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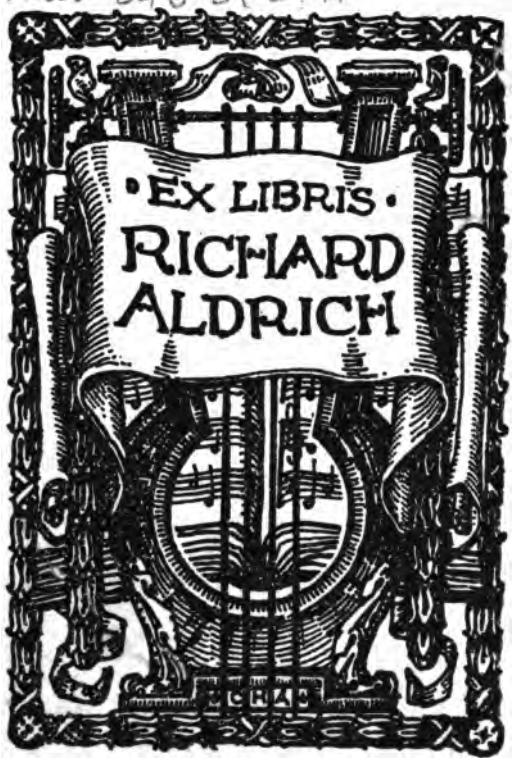

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THIRTY YEARS'

MUSICAL RECOLLECTIONS.

VOLUME II.

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"MODERN GERMAN MUSIC," "[illegible]

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LONDON.
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS.
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13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1862.

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MUSICAL RECOLLECTIONS.

BY

HENRY F. CHORLEY,

AUTHOR OF

"MODERN GERMAN MUSIC," "HANDEL STUDIES."

ETC., ETC.

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THE YEAR 1847.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "I Puritani," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Lucia," "Maria di Rohan,"* "L'Elisir," "Lucrezia Borgia."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni," "Le Nozze di Figaro."—*Mozart.* "Semiramide," "L'Italiana," "Il Barbiére," "La Gazza Ladra," "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.* "I due Foscari," "Ernani."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Persiani. Alboni.* Steffanone.* Corbari. Ronconi.—MM. Tamburini. Tagliafico.* Polonini. Ronconi. Salvi.* Mario. Marini.* Rovere.* Bellini.*

BALLETS.

"Manon Lescaut."* "La Rosiera."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Dumilatre. Fanny Elssler. Fuoco.*

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THE YEAR 1847.

It has already been told that, earlier than 1846, dissatisfaction in the Opera-performances at Her Majesty's Theatre,—so loudly recommended in print, so systematically weakened and impaired, was beginning to be general.—Ears are stubborn facts.—The increasing inferiority of the company, as a whole, was not to be concealed by the unanimous praises of which it was the object.—It has been told that the theatre was always crowded—that the audience was always rapturous. The time had been a golden time for those who made bouquets—since the rain of them was abundant and increasing. But spectators who cared the least for tales behind the curtain, of managerial disloyalty or artistic exaction—and who were the most willing to repose an average faith on all the papers put

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forth—remembered the good days that had been; and felt that however loud might be the trumpeting, however brilliantly put forth the procession of actors and singers—all vaunted as better than the best who had gone before them—the Opera was virtually in a state of downfall and deterioration.—The departure of one long before known as among the best musical conductors in Europe—and with it the dilution of orchestra and chorus—passed over, seemingly without any change in public favour.—Nothing, apparently, could be more prosperous, more popular, or beyond the power of revolt or opposition to interfere with.

During the season of 1846, however, it was announced that the few great singers left in Her Majesty's Theatre (Lablache excepted), and with them the orchestra and chorus, in a body, had followed Signor Costa; and that a new theatre for foreign musical performances would be opened with the new season.—The tale was denied and derided, as something too wild to have any reality; till it was known that the architect was already in possession of Covent Garden Theatre, with a plan for its entire reconstruction—that the works were in steady and rapid progress—and that engagements on a most ample scale of grandeur and individual excellence were signed and sealed.—The fact, in short, was no longer to be questioned.—The new

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undertaking was to be faced, destroyed, and ruined; or else the old one must needs give way.

It would serve no good turn further to enter into the private history of this musical event, with all its loops and turns—to recall the green-room tales and their contradictions, which agitated those who are concerned in such matters.—It is enough to have lived for a while in the caldron of Scandal, without stirring its waters afresh.—The new theatre did not tumble down like a house of cards. The officers of Justice did not enter with writs, at the eleventh hour, to lay the strong hand of prohibition on any acting or singing being attempted in an establishment already known, said its solvent well-wishers, to be insolvent. The Lord Chamberlain did not refuse his license, as it was promised for him that he should do. The singers were forthcoming on the day of rehearsal, which took place in the midst of scaffoldings, artificers, and every other apparent interruption and sign of incompleteness. At last, on the 6th of April, the Royal Italian Opera opened its doors with a fine performance of "Semiramide," in which, besides the excitement of the first night of a new undertaking, there was an attraction of late increasingly rare—the appearance of a new singer of the highest class, Mademoiselle Alboni.

Most of the other events of the first season of

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the Royal Italian Opera were virtually so many experiments or pioneers.—Madame Steffanone was new;—a steady, painstaking lady, with a sufficient voice, but no attraction which could entitle her to first honours.—She appeared in "Ernani" without herself or the opera exciting the slightest attention. Madame Ronconi was, in every respect, inferior. Some years ere this, as Mademoiselle Giannoni, she had excited a certain attention at the Lyceum Theatre, in Signor Coppola's poor "Nina." But she did not justify any promise.

Most of the new men only met with a tepid favour. Signor Salvi deserved something more, as being a well-trained tenor, with a sound and equable voice; but he had the fatal fault of being thoroughly uninteresting—and no tenor, in England, has made good his position in the face of such a drawback.—Signor Marini had a striking presence and a fine deep voice—one so generally out of tune that it was impossible to count on him for any certain enjoyment. Signor Rovere was one of those hard-working, comic Italians, in whom the hard work so overweighs the comedy that the strongest effect made by their fun is an impression of rueful desolation of spirit. Lablache described him to be as "comical as a hearse"—not knowing that, in England, "mutes" are among the merriest of men, when

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they go home from a funeral. Of Signor Ronconi a separate study must be offered.

We came that year to know, and to value, one of the most valuable artists of a second-class ever possessed by a theatre, in Signor Polonini.—The amount of service done by this gentleman, owing to his modest self-knowledge, is not to be over-estimated by those conversant with the world behind the curtain, and with its difficulties.

This year the new establishment came no nearer grand opera, as it was afterwards displayed there, than by giving "Lucrezia Borgia" with great force, in which Madame Grisi and Signor Mario brought their performances to that perfection which held out so long—and Madame Alboni's *Brindisi* had to be sung again and again, so jovial was it—and by closing the season with a splendid revival of Signor Rossini's "Donna del Lago."—The one blot on this was the coarse singing of the *Roderick Dhu*, Signor Bettini—a very bad tenor, of whom there is no need to speak further—save to put on record, that all the brilliancy of the airs of parade—written (if I am not mistaken) for a great singer, Nozzari—was coolly expunged, because the singer had never learned his art.—But then, how fresh sounded the music of the first act of that delicious opera!—winding up with the animated "*Chorus of Bards*," given with a numerical strength never assembled

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before in England;—how welcome after the fierce or feeble music of the later Italians, who had seemed for a while to push this master of genius from his stool!—If the music cannot hope to keep the stage (as is too likely), it may not be solely because the art of singing it adequately has all but perished; but in part from the utter nullity of the second act, which, however strengthened by the lovely quartett and duett from "Bianca and Faliero," is virtually a concert in costume, without an incident, or a spark of dramatic interest.—In the final varied air, which, with some alteration, the composer—at once as thrifty, as facile, and as unscrupulous as Handel had been before him—reproduced in "Zelmira," Madame Grisi that year displayed a grandeur of style, a finish, a "triumphancy," in which there was something of conscious power, conscious beauty, and intentional challenge. She was resolute—it is now fifteen years ago—in proving that she *had not* finished her career,—neither that she would be driven from her throne, as *Roxana*, by any *Statira*, who might, or could, or should, or would arrive.

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MADEMOISELLE ALBONI.

I ALWAYS connect one of Talfourd's happy critical phrases (how happy they were!)—in respect to an actress (I think Miss Chester) who played *Mrs. Sullen*, some forty years ago, and who, he said, had "corn and wine and oil" in her looks—with Madame Alboni.—There was never such a personation of teeming and genial prosperity seen in Woman's form.—Her face, with its broad, sunny, Italian beauty, incapable of frown—and her figure, were given out by Nature in some happy mood of mortal defiance to Tragedy and all its works; the features so regularly beautiful—the face so obstinately cheery, without variety; yet without vulgarity.

Nor was ever voice in more entire harmony with face and figure than was Mademoiselle Alboni's.—

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Hers was a rich, deep, real *contralto*, of two octaves from G to G—as sweet as honey—but not intensely expressive; and with that tremulous quality which reminds fanciful speculators of the quiver in the air of the calm, blazing, summer's noon.—I recollect no low Italian* voice so luscious.

Since that day the genial *contralto* has, herself, changed singularly little—save in consequence of attempts made to extend her voice; and these (after its register is settled) *must* impair its tone.—Her stage position with the public has been the same, —with no advance, if little retreat.—That she has held no theatre for a long period, is easily to be accounted for—without the slightest depreciation of a talent so rich, so equable, so borne out by technical accompaniments.—Nature did not limit her means, by the excess of personal comeliness bestowed on her.—The bulk of Lablache was small impediment to his versatile assumption of the most different and difficult characters.—Those who are familiar with the Parisian theatres a quarter of a century since, must remember Mademoiselle Mante as one of the most highly-finished actresses belonging to the great period of the *Theatre Français*, when Mademoiselle Mars reigned there. That lady

* We have had, and have, English voices as rich—witness the low voices of Mrs. Alfred Shaw (too early lost) and of Miss Lascelles. Neither of these could be exceeded.

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absolutely appeared to derive stateliness and grandeur from peculiarities which would have weighed down and choked nine out of ten women.—It has been the absence of vivacity, of variety of dramatic instinct, which has made Madame Alboni's many delicious qualities pall, after a time.—Her singing has been always too monochromatic.—To one or two of her favourite pieces—such as the Swiss *rondo* in "Betly," and the supper-song in "Lucrezia Borgia"—she gave a certain character and animation; but these were exceptions to her general manner.—Nor was this redeemed by any variety in vocal resource. Once having heard any song by Madame Alboni; and it was to be heard, for ever afterwards, unchanged and the same.—This has been the case with other great singers—especially with Madame Pasta, who never altered a phrase or an ornament, when they were once selected and settled. But the difference is this—Madame Pasta, by the resistless geniality of her genius, always contrived (as I have said) to deceive her hearers into thinking that she was delighting them for the first time.—Even when one laid in wait for a *cadenza*, or a passage, or a phrase remembered as precious—when the same arrived, it always produced the surprise of sounding better than had been expected.—It was not so with Madame Al-

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boni.—There is a part of every audience that will listen only tranquilly, after a time, to the most mellow of voices, to the most exact musical execution—unless with the same qualities other elements to charm are joined.

Some consciousness of this kind seems to have suggested itself to the great *contralto* singer; and to have excited her to a restlessness of career singularly at variance with a physical placidity so remarkable as hers.—By way of enlarging the circle of her attractions, she resolved, as has been said, upon the experiment of extending her voice upwards. This in experiment never to be tried with success, except, perhaps, in early youth.—The required high notes were forthcoming. But the entire texture of the voice was injured: its luscious quality, and some of its power, were inevitably lost—without its gaining the qualities of effect longed for.—That the differences which the same note, if sung by voices of different quality, can assume, are such as to mystify the ear, has not been sufficiently taken into account by voice-breakers. To give an obvious instance:—A melody on three notes, from C below the line on the treble clef to E a third upwards might be devised, which every average voice of the four voices in the quartett ought to be able to sing; yet with a little adroit alternation, the keenest listener might be thrown out of the power

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of recognizing the identity of the sound.—Madame Alboni has, during her career, sang the music for *Ninetta*, *Zerlina*, *Amina* (even!), and *Rosina:* and always went through the task correctly, and, for a while, in tune; but the voice remained to be always a spoiled *contralto;* though enfeebled, heavy, and, by its displacement, rendered incapable of predominating in music, as the leading voice of the quartett must do.—It was only, therefore, that, by frequently changing the arena of her exhibitions, that Madame Alboni, in her altered state, could keep the reputation which had originally by right belonged to her; and which now could only in part be maintained by curiosity, and past pleasant remembrances. The pecuniary profit of the result (a *soprano* being notoriously more "worthy"—to borrow a grammar phrase—in the treasurer's book than a *contralto*) has nothing to do with a question of art argued before the curtain.

Enough, by way of general character, prefacing what may be hereafter said in regard to a great and successful artist; if not of the first-class as a genius, almost, if not altogether, the last of the great Italian singers.—The last truth may be accounted for by the fact that Madame Alboni's real training never began till she had left her own land behind her.—Nor was it wonderful that, when this gorgeous voice, and capital method, and charming

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execution of hers were first heard, at the Royal Italian Opera, in the display-music of *Arsace*, our public was entranced to such a spell-bound delight as may be enjoyed in the island of lotus-eaters.—There might be less grandeur in her than with Pisaroni, less fire than with Malibran; but that delicious satisfaction to the ear—that perfect musical finish—that composure (the verging of which towards indolence could not at first be detected) amounted to a new sensation.—To Mademoiselle Alboni — then unmarried — assuredly, fell the honours of the first night of the new theatre. During the season, too, she sang through the entire range of music belonging to her voice, with the same calmness, vocal perfection, and undisturbed, undisputed triumph. If I recollect right, as *Pippo* in "La Gazza," she had to sing the entire first *solo*, in the duett "*Ebben per mia memoria*," three times over—not greatly to the satisfaction of the *Ninetta*, such duett having been omitted in the season 1834, which, in the *Ninetta*, had brought to light the gracious promise, and the extraordinary power, of the identical *Ninetta* of 1847—Madame Grisi.

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SIGNOR RONCONI.

I HAVE now to speak of a great artist, in every respect the reverse of the delicious singer just parted with.—Greater could not be the contrast in every attribute and qualification, than between the excellent *contralto*, with her incomparable voice, her undramatic style, her brilliant execution, and her grand Coreggio face—and the baritone, with his wondrously limited means so shaped and turned to account by Genius, as to make every limit, every defect, forgotten and forgiven.—It was not till the Royal Italian Opera-house was opened that the English had the remotest idea of the wonderful endowments of Signor Ronconi as an actor, and their power to make forgotten vocal defects which, with any one else, must have been fatal and decisive. There are few instances of a voice so

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limited in compass, (hardly exceeding an octave), so inferior in quality, so weak, so habitually out of tune as his.—Nor has its owner ever displayed any compensating executive power. Volubility there has been none, nor variety in ornament—one close, of the simplest possible form, doing duty perpetually,—in this, marking the entire contrast between him and his predecessor, Signor Tamburini!—Skill of phrasing there has been; especially in the languid slow movements affected to satiety by Bellini and Donizetti. I dwell on these facts all the more emphatically, because it will be next to impossible for persons of the next generation to conceive the slender physical means on which his popularity has been built; and (what makes the wonder more strange), in many of the characters which that magnificently-gifted artist and singer, Lablache, had delighted to present.—And more, there has not been anything like personal beauty, or presence, to make amends for deficiencies of tone. The low stature—the features, unmarked and commonplace when silent,—promising nothing to an audience—yet which could express a dignity of bearing, a tragic passion which cannot be exceeded, —or an exuberance of the wildest, quaintest, most whimsical, most spontaneous comedy, flung out by animal spirits in Mirth's most tameless humour,—these things we have seen, and have forgotten per-

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sonal insignificance, vocal power below mediocrity; every falling-short, every disqualification, in the spell of strong, real, sensibility. I owe some of my best Opera-evenings to Signor Ronconi; and, looking back, cannot resist trying to specify a few,—difficult though the task be, of putting on record effects so sudden, so transient, and, in his case, I fancy, so little studied beforehand.

The first of these—in conjunction, (to be fair,) with the delicious singing of the new *contralto*, who was *encored* in every note of her part of *Gondi* —"broke the fall" of Donizetti's "Maria di Rohan" —not a strong opera,—in which the heroine's part, of itself null, was lost by its being entrusted to Madame Ronconi,—a lady who insisted on singing, little to the pleasure of our public, and for whose sake (as it has been elsewhere commemorated) her husband, though himself a first favourite, was visited with condign displeasure in a certain Italian Opera-house, for not employing his marital authority to keep his partner quiet.—Here she was received with indifference; just tolerated as an appendage to a great artist, but not encouraged to appear a second time.

There have been few such examples of terrible courtly tragedy in Italian Opera as Signor Ronconi's *Chevreuse*:—the polished demeanour of his earlier scenes giving a fearful force of contrast

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to the latter ones when the torrent of pent-up passion nears the precipice. In spite of the discrepancy between all our ideas of serious and sentimental music, and the old French dresses which we are accustomed to associate with the *Dorantes* and *Alcestes* of Molière's dramas, the terror of the last scene, when (betwixt his teeth, almost,) the great artist uttered the line,

"Sull' uscio tremendo lo sguardo figgiamo,"

clutching, the while, the weak and guilty woman by her wrist, as he dragged her to the door behind which her falsity was screened, was something fearful—a sound to chill the blood—a sight to stop the breath.

Then, again, it was Signor Ronconi's dignity and force, as the *Doge*, which saved "I due Foscari" from utter commendation at the new theatre:—a feat all the more remarkable from his being grouped in that opera with Madame Grisi and Signor Mario; neither of whom found power in it to move the audience. The subtlety of his by-play in the last act was rare, original, and real.—It has been too largely assumed that a face cannot hold a public in thrall, especially in serious drama, save it be Siddonian. Few actresses have possessed features less marked and significant than Madame Allan, of the Theatre Français. Yet one of the most striking effects that ever thrilled an audience was the

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sudden, quick glance of Hope's inquiry, and suspicion, in "La joie fait peur," which she cast round her, when, on languidly entering into the midst of the household group, like one numbed to death with her sorrow—some word arrested her, as though a change had passed over them since she had been last among them—and then, the after-fading of the dream!

In this last act of "I due Foscari," the old, iron, noble *Doge*, tortured betwixt the heart of a father, and the duties of a Monarch, (half a slave to the jealous and corrupt and haughty folk who had invested him with supremacy,) has to sit mute, while the lady, distracted at the impending death of her lover (his son, doomed by the *Doge*), vents prayers, tears, and, these last being fruitless, maledictions, against the Sovereign who will not pardon—against the father, who is as deaf to the voice of Nature as the "nether millstone;"—and the *Doge* is old, with a foretaste in him of Death, bred of the resolution which has decreed his son's death, in obedience to his inexorable duty to Venice.—How the *Doge* of whom I am speaking sate in his chair of state, with a hand on each elbow of it as moveless and impassive as the thing of wood by Giovanni Bellini pictured in our National Gallery (a picture to haunt one); while the woman—not singing to him, but to the stalls—

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flung out her agony in a Verdi *cavatina*—I shall never forget.

But the modern ordinances of Italian Opera, including Verdi's *cavatina*, will have everything done twice—will have the agony all over again—and, that the *prima donna* may take rest, (because her agony must be more agonized the second than the first time), the stupid form is that of making a loud noise during several bars,—a poor imitation of Signor Rossini's poor fillings-up.

During this pause, the hands of the *Doge* were unclenched from the elbows of his chair. He looked sad, weary, weak—leaned back, as if himself ready to give up the ghost; but when the woman, after the allotted bars of noise, began again her second-time agony, it was wondrous to see how the old Sovereign turned in his chair, with the regal endurance of one who says, "*I must endure to the end*," and again gathered his own misery into his old father's heart, and shut it up close till the woman had ended.—Unable to grant her petition —unable to free his son—after such a scene, the aged man, when left alone, could only rave, till his heart broke.—Signor Ronconi's *Doge* is not to be forgotten by those who do not treat Art as a toy, or the singer's art as something entirely distinct from dramatic truth.

Then, how is it to be forgotten that this *Doge* was

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presented by the same man whose quack-doctor in "Elisir" showed that wondrous, professionally-haggard charlatan, *Dulcamara*—more of a machine than a human being—glib, miserable, worn-out: yet unable to be quiet for a single second?—The lean quack, and the horrible horse, and the shabby chaise,—and the utterly disrespectable puffery of the man and his drugs, by the very creature who, obviously, had the least belief in their efficacy, as might be heard in the monotone of his voice, (and the horse and the chaise were, obviously, inventions of Signor Ronconi's)—make up a whole, almost unique in farce-Opera.

Almost—yet not altogether so; because I cannot help commemorating the starved, miserable Poet in "Matilda di Shabran"—a wretched droll, belonging to low Italian farce, but, somehow, patched up by this great Southern man into a charācter;—without recalling his *Papageno*, in "Die Zauberflöte"—not

"The poor bird-boy with his roasted sloes,"

be-sung by Bloomfield—but the bird-creature—half man, half parokeet—"who could charm the bird from the tree," (as *Mrs. Hardcastle* said of *Tony Lumpkin*).—Anything more utterly ridiculous can never have been conceived or executed, than this presentation so carried out.

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I recall these examples, because they will perhaps be among the less familiar of those by which the versatility of this remarkable artist is proved. One could write a page on his *Barber*, in Signor Rossini's master-work;—a paragraph on his *Duke* in "Lucrezia Borgia;" an exhibition of dangerous, suspicious, sinister malice, such as the stage has rarely shown; another on his *Podesta* in "La Gazza Ladra," (in these two characters bringing him into close rivalry with Lablache—a rivalry from which he issued unharmed); and last, and almost best, of his creations, his *Masetto*, (as signal a success as his *Don Juan* had been a signal mistake—one of his two mistakes, the other being *Guillaume Tell*)—if the matter in hand was a complete history. But, fortunately, this is not a thing possible to be produced here—Signor Ronconi being, happily for Tragedy and Comedy, still on the stage.

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THE YEAR 1848.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Lucrezia Borgia," "La Figlia," "Linda," "L'Elisir," "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "Robert le Diable."—*Meyerbeer.* "Le Nozze."—*Mozart.* "Il Barbiére,"—*Rossini.* "Ernani," "Attila," "I due Foscari," "Nino."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Cruvelli.* Vera.* Abbadia.* Schwartz.* Lind. Tadolini.* MM. Cuzzani.* Gardoni. Beletti.* Lablache. F. Lablache. Bouche. Coletti. Labocetta.* Sims Reeves.*

BALLETS.

"Fiorita."* "The Four Seasons."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. M. Taglioni. Cerito. Rosati. Carlotta Grisi. M. St. Léon.

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THE YEAR 1848.

THE season of 1848 made it obvious that Mademoiselle Lind was an artist who exhausted as much as she assisted any theatre at which she sang.—Her own *prestige* was still great; but it became evident that she was not easily to be worked as a member of a company: that her repertory was very limited—and one in which, seemingly, she sought for undivided predominance. The additions to her list of characters this year were in "L'Elisir," "Lucia," and "I Puritani." Seeing that in the second opera a strong tenor, as having "the last word," must efface the effect of the *soprano*—there was only a graceful tenor to Mademoiselle Lind's *Lucia*—and the opera pleased, as though it had been a pleasure taken by *Lady Grace*, "soberly"—in spite of a great and new excellence introduced into it by the

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heroine—already mentioned—her preparation for the catastrophe of *The Bride's* madness.

The misfortune to a theatre of a success so preternaturally forced as hers, is to destroy the chances of any who aspire to make a position beside the idol. —The two new ladies brought here to sing when she could not, were heard by the public with the most royal indifference; which, on grounds totally opposite, neither merited.—The first was a young singer then, of high promise; this was Mademoiselle Cruvelli;—the second was a lady who (if no longer in the bloom of her talent) had gained, deservedly, a universal Italian reputation,—this was Madame Tadolini.

Though Mademoiselle Cruvelli proved, a year or two later—in London and in Paris—the most disappointing person whom I have ever heard, when she arrived in London for Mademoiselle Lind's second season, she had more of the qualities which excite expectation than belong to ninety-nine out of a hundred stage-singers;—youth—a presence commanding, if somewhat peculiar (with a difference, recalling that of Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler)—a superb voice, almost three octaves in compass—and a fervour and ambition which it could not be then foreseen would take their after-forms of reckless and perverse eccentricity.—She gained, as Time went on, some of the appearance, some of

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the reality, of a vocalist—but with every such gain, in skill and in position, there seemed to come a loss—an added inconsistency, wildness, disregard of such usages as belong to progress, justified by no temporary popularity,—whether here or over the water. Towards the close of her theatrical career, there were hazardous musical freaks ventured, at the *Grand Opera* of Paris, by Mademoiselle Cruvelli, hardly to be precedented.—She thought it becoming to alter a rhythm, in a duett from "Les Huguenots," from triple to common *tempo*.—The curiosities of her reading of the striking temple scene in the second act of Spontini's "Vestale," where she turned her back on her duty to the artists about to enter, and gesticulated to the stalls, are before my eyes:—But in the year of which I now speak, Mademoiselle Cruvelli was rich in promise as few have been. Prophecy itself would have been puzzled to discern how this might be falsified. But when she sang carefully (a little like a scholar), and acted discreetly (yet obviously with intelligence), she passed unregarded —always theatrically applauded,—but without any person concerned in her place of trial paying apparent attention to one, in most respects, then so extraordinary.

Madame Tadolini fared yet worse.—Her years were unfairly counted against her.—She fell on a

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soil wholly uncongenial to a southern woman, who has been famous at home, and whose rights to fame were far from having died out.—There was small care or pains taken to conceal from her that she was a merely "stop-gap." The opera, "Linda," in which she appeared, has never been a popular one in England. She was ill dressed—and some of her vocal freshness and accomplishment had, no doubt, departed from her: and, accordingly, she went as she came, without exciting the slightest interest in the public.

There were other new ladies. There was Mademoiselle Abbadia, whose painful appearance in "Nino" broke down even the universal enthusiasm organised at Her Majesty's Theatre. There was Mademoiselle Vera, already prized in London as a refined and interesting concert singer; but then hardly ripe enough for stage duties—especially in atmosphere so unfriendly. There was Mademoiselle Schwartz, a German *contralto*, having no real voice—best to be recollected in London by a sudden shriek in the midst of a German *lied*, by which she cleared a private *salon*, in which many innocent persons of taste were assembled to enjoy music, and not such cruel wonders. But, as a whole, the company of ladies manœuvred without success, whether alone or in concert.

One artist, new to England—Signor Beletti—

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took his ground here, at once, as the *basso cantante* next to Signor Tamburini who had been heard for twenty years.—That he has since improved his position in this country, as a serious concert-singer of the highest order, need hardly be added.—The two new Italian tenors were worthless. Our redoubtable countryman, Mr. Sims Reeves (probably the best English tenor who has ever existed), sang once only—owing, it was said before the curtain, to misunderstandings behind it.

We were still not habituated to Signor Verdi's violent music; and thus his "Attila" was rejected in London. An attempt was made by Mademoiselle Cruvelli, by extra animation in the amazonian part of its heroine, to "improve" (as divines have it) the political events of the insurrectionary year 1848. But the fire was not sacred—the flame did not kindle our cold hearts—the patriotic shout fell on deaf ears.

The year, in brief, in spite of every outward sign of honour and glory, was felt to be virtually one announcing decomposition and embarrassment.

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THE YEAR 1848.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula," "Gli Montecchi."—*Bellini.* "Lucia," "La Favorita," "Lucrezia"—*Donizetti.* "La Prova d'un Opera Seria."—*Gnecco.* "Les Huguenots."*—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Il Tancredi," "La Donna del Lago," "La Cenerentola," "Guillaume Tell," "Il Barbiére," "Semiramide."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Persiani. Alboni. Castellan. Grisi. Viardot.—MM. Salvi. Polonini. Corradi-Setti.* Roger.* Mario. Tamburini. Flavio.* Ronconi. Marini.

Principal Dancer.

Mdlle. Fabbri.

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THE YEAR 1848.

This year placed the artistic success of the new opera theatre beyond possible question.—Rumours were circulated before the curtain of the Haymarket Opera House with eager alacrity, speaking of wreck and ruin as imminent; and these were proved not to be baseless by subsequent disclosures in the law-courts, of heavy losses endured by the original capitalists.—But to close a theatre in which a public finds enjoyment, and from which good things are to be expected, is a catastrophe harder to bring about than the outer world, unaware of the fascination of such speculations, could be readily made to believe.—Musically, the performances at the Royal Italian Opera were of a magnificence which entirely bore down the attraction of the rival theatre—great and intoxicating as

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it was, in the presence of a singer who had driven the world, sacred and profane, well-nigh frantic. The productions of "La Favorita" and "Les Huguenots," on a scale of splendour totally unattempted before, settled the question of character, with a decision beyond all power of cavil or cabal to shake.

The former opera—Donizetti's best serious work—had never till then been relished in England. In truth, to counterbalance the painful nature of the story, it required, for this country, such impassioned singing and acting as those of Madame Grisi and Signor Mario, and such a lavish splendour of pictorial decoration and choral solemnity as was thrown into the impressive monastery-act. Even with all these advantages and accessories, "La Favorita" has never been so popular with us as "Lucrezia Borgia," though it is by much the finer opera of the two.

Then, too, public attention was absorbed by the revelation of M. Meyerbeer's brilliant dramatic genius, which had till then been denied, or grudgingly admitted here.—"Les Huguenots" had been produced in Paris twelve years earlier;—and a performance of it, on a reduced scale, had been offered in London by a Belgian and by a German company;—but our critics and connoisseurs had ignored it, with small exception; and those who spoke of it enthu-

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siastically from having heard it in Paris, (I may allude among them to myself*), were treated with ridicule or silence. Like all dramatic music, it is little fit for the concert-room, — as little fit as *Donna Anna's* great recitative—or the murder-duett in "Otello." Neither can it be effectively performed by a handful of artists in a corner. Had it not been for Madame Viardot's engagement, we might never have made its acquaintance, —for the Italian artists derided it then.—"Chinese music," I think, they called it; and but for the animating presence of the *Valentine*, most of its great situations would have passed off coldly. It may be said to have been produced "against the grain," though no pains and splendour in preparation had been denied it, and the cast was a strong one. It was produced on a Court-night, "when our Royalties came in state"; and, so far as I can recollect, the opera was "commanded."—But, from the evening of its production at Covent Garden Theatre, our public was grasped by that grand musical tragedy with a hold which, it will be seen, has not yet been loosened.

The revival of "Tancredi," though the singing of Madame Persiani and Madame Alboni was delicious, produced no effect. Neither did that of

* "Music and Manners in France and North Germany," 1841

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Bellini's weak "Gli Montecchi," in spite of Madame Viardot's picturesqueness and power as *Romeo* (especially displayed in the second act). Neither could all the beauty of "Guillaume Tell" establish that opera—(a feat which has not been accomplished till the present year, 1861).—That cleverest but most mannered of French tenors, M. Roger, found no favour here. Though the day of French Grand Opera was, clearly, at last come; as the inevitable resource against Italian penury —the time for French singers had not yet arrived, —the reception on the English stage of M. Duprez (though he came to England when in his wane) making the exception to the general indifference.

It was a mistake to give Beethoven's "Mount of Olives" at a sacred concert with Italian words —possibly, prompted by the popularity of Signor Rossini's "Stabat." The weakness of that *Cantata*, which is theatrical without being dramatic, became doubly apparent under the disadvantages of translation, and when it was sung by those who did not—perhaps could not—bend themselves strenuously to the task.—For Beethoven's music, even more than that of any other German composer, are wanted German singers.

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M. MEYERBEER'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISTICS.

It may be too early to offer a complete character of an artist, whose remarkable talent so nearly approaches genius as to make the distinction a matter of the most extreme nicety. But the pre-eminent position held by M. Meyerbeer as a composer in our foreign Opera-houses since the year 1848, makes the attempt a matter of necessity.

He cannot be numbered amongst the musicians whose individuality asserted itself at once. But men must be valued in Art by what they do, not by when they do it,—and again, not by quantity alone, but by quality. Such promise as there is in M. Meyerbeer's earlier operas, confines itself to a display of the old known Italian forms. Even in

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"Il Crociato," which reveals a perceptibly advancing ambition, that which is faded and borrowed predominates. There is an inherent leanness in the ideas, in spite of the semblance of great pomp and brilliancy. Though he was born and trained in Germany, there is little or nothing of the home-spirit in the music of Weber's fellow-pupil.—When he wrote for Italy, he was unable, like Hasse, and other of his countrymen who have adopted the Southern stage, thoroughly to Italianize himself—to assume the ease, and the *disinvoltura,* which characterize all the theatrical music of the South. In fact, till the *Grand Opera* of Paris, with all its resources,—in those days more vast than were to be found elsewhere,—was open to him, M. Meyerbeer did not find his style or his vocation, —which was to produce elaborate dramas in music of the eclectic school.

The operas since produced by him are more difficult to analyse than even the generality of specimens of eclectic art, so intricate is the mixture of many elements—the mosaic of what is precious with what is trite—which they display; so far beyond the beaten track of rule and precedent do they travel in their course.

M. Meyerbeer's timidity in construction,* the

* That this amounts to want of resource, can hardly be questioned. Experienced as M. Meyerbeer is, and rest-

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absence of sustaining breadth in his inspirations, may in part be ascribed to his having studied under Vogler, (Weber's master, too), a man of genius, but in some degree eccentric, many of whose principles and practices have been pronounced unsound by the thoroughly instructed.—The original vein of melody, however, can hardly have been rich. No tune of M. Meyerbeer's has become a household word. On the other hand, no one has shown so much patience in research for effect—such an indomitable ambition as he.—Stage combination cannot go further than in the quarrel-

lessly in quest of effect, his devices of modulation and progression are strangely few; and his favourite one, a close chromatic sequence, gives a feeling of narrowness as distinct from breadth—and of uneasiness, at variance with that impression of frankness and nature so desirable in all composition—especially for voices.—It is observable, again, that in his elaborate pieces, M. Meyerbeer appears frequently embarrassed how to return to his key—and that their close by no means corresponds with their commencement.—Writers of the new school, it is true, too largely show a disposition to fling off this necessity, in their search for what is vague, and their avoidance of commonplace; but the emancipation, when defended as a principle, can merely be regarded as a movement of decomposition,—which, if taken into conjunction with the annihilation of rhythm, and "the concealment of melody" (a phrase we have lived to hear gravely used), would go far to throw Music back into the chaos from which the art struggled slowly into life-breath and beauty.

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scene in the *Pre aux Clercs*, in the third act of "Les Huguenots"—than in the cathedral-scene in "Le Prophète"—than in the first *finale* to "L'Etoile." This last, however—as many an old Mass for four choirs and more could testify—is an affair of calculation, not inspiration,—a feat the difficulty of which seems to be greater than it is, and to the accomplishment of which some nature and grace in idea must inevitably be sacrificed—since the pieces to be enwrought into such a mosaic, must necessarily be made of a particular and geometrical shape—the themes only becoming tractable in proportion as they are small in limit, and insipid. —There is far more of real, individual excellence—far more of material added to the musician's stores —in M. Meyerbeer's treatment of the orchestra. For this, no less than for colour in painting, there must, I have always held, be natural instinct,—a happiness of touch and arrangement not to be communicated by precept.—It is true, that some of M. Meyerbeer's discoveries and effects belong to the curiosities of Music, and as such will not bear repetition; that he too often affects those instrumental mixtures, which startle rather than satisfy; that, sometimes, he neglects that portion of the orchestra, the quartett of stringed instruments, in which its life-blood may be said to reside. But, besides all this, there is something real, pre-

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cious—altogether the artist's own—in the instrumental settings of his operas, which must be contemplated with pleasure,—though they cannot be appealed to as a model, without danger of exaggeration and conceit on the part of the imitator.—There is nothing less satisfactory than the music of those who have taken M. Meyerbeer's combinations and triumphs as their point of departure.

M. Meyerbeer's most striking individuality will be found in rhythm. In this branch of his art, he is so strong as to be able to conceal inequalities, which, in the hands of any artist less strong, would be fatal to the ear's pleasure. Of the hundreds who have marched to the grand Coronation tune in "Le Prophète," there are, probably, not ten people who recollect, that the first phrase of that gorgeous March is one of five bars.—No one, again, has given such stateliness and variety to the somewhat formal measure of the Minuet, as he has done. The Minuet which opens the last act of "Les Huguenots," (now too frequently omitted, owing to the length of the opera), has a combination of stateliness and variety, which, till he came, had not been found.—But M. Meyerbeer's dance-music is so bold, brilliant, seductive, and characteristic, as to form a feature of as much importance as beauty. It was to the charm of the *ballet* and the pantomime that "Robert" owed much of its first success. It is the vivacity and

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seizing grace of the *ballets* which carry off the heaviness of the third act of "Le Prophète," unrelieved as the act is (which is always dangerous), by the contrast of a woman's voice.

In this portion of his music, we seem to touch the most spontaneous side of M. Meyerbeer's talent. Though not unfrequently commonplace in his vocal melodies—though seldom, if ever, able to furnish a good second part to a tune, let its opening phrase have been ever so attractive—the elegance of his dance-music is as striking as is its originality.—There is nothing fragmentary in it—no want of breath; but everywhere an affluent, luxurious fancy,—a piquancy, a pomp, a sentiment, as may be demanded,—raising that which is only accessory and ornamental to a consequence which it has acquired in few other hands. M. Meyerbeer's extreme *fidgettiness* in notation (no other word than this colloquial one so precisely expresses my meaning), is calculated to increase the impression of patchwork which the eye receives when studying one of his scores. Many of the half-bars perpetually poked in by him, to the utter damage of orderly symmetry, are merely so many expressions of a *rallentando* movement which the master has been resolute to regulate, so as to reduce the singer into a condition of an obsequious automaton. This is needless, wrong, and wearying to those on whom every com-

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poser must depend,—as depriving them of their individuality. To me a Geneva box is as expressive as the interpreter, who is so nipped, and trimmed, and padded, that he can only raise his eyebrows, or prolong his breath for one second's or for three second's time, just as the master shall please. There can be no true musical execution without freedom—and freedom means playing—playing with singing among other plays.

But in the annals of musical works—produced by a man of great success—it may be said, without malice, that nothing has been produced at once so elaborate and so altered as M. Meyerbeer's operas. There are tales of mischief and intrigue current in the world—before the curtain—which are too droll in their exaggeration to pass without the strongest protest.—Living folk still record tales how, when "Robert le Diable" was coming, people were hired, —"*dormeurs*,"—to sleep in the pit,—possibly to snore,—every evening when "Guillaume Tell" was performed.—What avail professional sleepers, whether seven or seventy and seven?—"The little finger" of "Guillaume Tell" is more precious than the whole body of "Robert."

I allude openly to these children's tales because they inevitably enter into such a book as mine. The certainty is, that M. Meyerbeer has always shown himself undecided. The first dramatic

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idea, with him, would seem to go little beyond his yielding to the temptation of a period, a trait of local colour, a subject, and its developments and transformations, till the last moment when it appears, to be at the mercy of Chance—then to be ruled by some accessory consideration referable to other things than musical purpose, or continuous thought.

"Robert," it has been said, by Dr. Veron, in his "Memoirs," (and Dr. Veron was the manager of the Grand Opera when "Robert" was adventured), was made and re-made, ere it took its present form.—The scene of resuscitation in the ruined convent owed its ghastly colour to a stage-manager, who fancied something newer and more awful than the *ballet* of simpering women with wreaths and garlands, laid out for it.—The two grand operas which followed "Robert" at the same theatre, have been more largely modified and reconsidered. The fourth act of "Les Huguenots," that masterpiece of dramatic effect—stands in its present form owing to Nourrit, the singer.—It was originally intended that the St. Bartholomew massacre should be organized by *Queen Marguerite*, and not by the father of the heroine; but it was pointed out, that the interest attaching to the presence of *Valentine*, as an involuntary and horror-stricken witness, would be impaired by the predominance on the stage of ano-

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ther female character,—and the change for the better was accordingly made.—Yet more,—the grand duett with which the act now closes—*that* duett of passion and agony, which every subsequent tragical composer has tried to emulate—that duett, which has been commented on as an unparagoned proof of force on the part of a master, who could produce such effects with two voices, after such an overcoming and astounding a chorus as "the Blessing of the Swords"—was an afterthought, wrought out in complaisance to Nourrit; who felt that the situation of the two lovers in the drama not only admitted, but demanded, such an encounter—such an outburst—such a confession, wrung out by the terror of such a parting, in such a place, at such a time.—Certainly, never was suggestion adopted and acted upon with more power and felicity.—This duett is perhaps the most brilliant illustration contributed by Music to the chapter of accidents.

Still greater are understood to have been the changes made in "Le Prophète," because more long-drawn was the period of its gestation.—It was contrived and "cast on" for Nourrit, possibly at the instance of that poetical artist,—the most intellectually gifted of tenors on record. Yet, the opera did not see the light till Nourrit's successor (M. Duprez) had vanished from the French stage,—and, in him,

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the only artist whose peculiar qualities and excellencies would have enabled him to do entire musical and dramatic justice to the arduous part of *John of Leyden*,—the lover, the son, the self-abused Fanatic, struck down in his hour of pride and triumph by shame, remorse, and retribution.—Till now, only one half of so mixed and difficult a character has been conceived and wrought out. *This* representative has given us the love and the personal charm—the filial affection—the suppliant weakness, dissembling to avoid the horror of detection—the Sardanapalus touch of voluptuousness with which Wreck, and Ruin, and Death are invested with all the wreaths and robes of revelry—half reckless, half melancholy.—*The other* singer may have been more sufficient to the drama, in the scenes where the false Fanatics tempt the true Dreamer:—and where he, in his turn, overrules the rising rebellion by the command of his presence, in the moment of hazard;—but I have never seen anything like a complete conception of the character, so wide in its range of emotions,—and might have doubted its possibility, had I not remembered the admirable, subtle, and riveting dramatic treatment of *Eleazar* in "La Juive," (the *Shylock* of Opera,) by M. Duprez.

The difficulty of finding any adequate representative of the principal false-hero-character,—and the

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circumstance of one of the greatest creative artists whom the world has ever seen, being within reach, at the moment when the drama was to be given,—may have caused the extensive alterations, almost amounting to re-construction, which "Le Prophète" underwent, with M. Roger and Madame Viardot as its leading personages. The Mother (a character, by strange chance, new to serious Opera,) was, from a secondary figure, transformed into a principal one; and the betrothed Bride of the fanatic leader, (the outrage on which bride, by feudal exaction, was one main motive of his rebellion, and of his yielding to the false counsels of the Anabaptist fanatics,) was deprived of her original importance to the story. The gain was great and peculiar, inasmuch as it placed a new type — that of the devoted and devout burgher-woman, without youth or beauty—on the Opera-stage; but the drama and the music, if considered as a whole—lost by it. —Something of the contrast which is so essential to a long and serious work, was taken away—something of proportion destroyed.

In another point of view, M. Meyerbeer's over-solicitude must result in dangerous change to every work so calculated as are his works, when they are produced under new circumstances.—It has cost "Les Huguenots" some of its most charming music, —and, in England, more than this. The original

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commencement of the opera is now annihilated, everywhere; and yet the original commencement of the opera has a courtly elegance and finish, a delicacy of phrase, a distinction of form, such as cannot be packed away or suppressed, without loss to the great picture, and damage to the Master, who has shown himself as capable of seizing in music the cameleon colours of artificial society, as of grasping the rude customs of rough, natural character.—Then, the amount of complication—the resolution to demand from every executing voice its extremest services—which are peculiar to M. Meyerbeer's operas, renders a perfect execution of them so difficult, as to be the exception, not the rule. There has been no perfect execution of any among them save at the time and place of their first production. — That which can be obtained after months of preparation in Paris, from artists excited to prodigious feats by the perpetual presence of one merciless in exaction, can only at very rare intervals be produced elsewhere.—I shall speak of the subsequent works of M. Meyerbeer in some detail, as is the due to their importance to modern opera.

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MADAME PAULINE VIARDOT.

One of the greatest first-class singers of any time is now to be set in her place so far as I can do it,—a woman of genius peculiar, inasmuch as it is universal. The gibe of "inspired idiocy" has been too often thrown by their contemners against musicians—most of all, executant musicians. It is well, once in a life's experience, to have known, seen, and proved, that the culture of art to its highest point, in a world mistrusted unfairly as one of exclusive sensual seduction, neither narrows, nor precludes, nor preoccupies the artist, so as to limit the play of fancy, or the exercise of wholesome affection, or the intelligence which will keep abreast of its time.—Let the excuse be taken away, once for all, from the torpid and mercenary who would shelter themselves behind it—let the reproach be, once for all, silenced in the mouths of superficial bystanders. — There was no more consummate, devoted, thoroughly-

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musical musician, than the composer of "Elijah;" —yet he was the man of wit, the man of reading, the man of society, the man of many languages, the man of other arts and other worlds than his own.—His, however, is not a solitary instance, without a parallel.

Madame Viardot—born Pauline Garcia—from her outset in life, stood before the public in a position difficult to occupy:—under the disadvantageous shelter of a family name.—There have been mediocre tribes of stage and concert people, it is true, who have been helped and placed by the incident of birth,—such folk as the four singing sisters Heinefetter—and as many singing sisters Vespermann.—In a singing family there is, mostly, a duett—a better and a worse voice—a train and a train-bearer—and the worse voice gets dragged up by supporting the better one.—Such, however, was not the case with Pauline Garcia.—Malibran had gone years before her time of coming came; and the melancholy circumstances of so painful a death, after so meteoric a career as Malibran's, enhanced a reputation which had been already in itself formidable enough.—Her younger sister had to face the world of art uncompanioned, and without having natural attractions equal to those of her father's daughter, who had already a second time made the name glorious.

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The Italian stage, at the time when Pauline Garcia ventured on it, was filled by a woman in her prime of beauty, with a voice almost faultless; possessing a rare shrewdness of appropriation, if not powers of invention—a nature rich in dramatic impulse—untiring health, unfailing equality —and who, by this wonderful combination of qualities, kept her throne at the Italian Opera against all comers and goers for a quarter of a century, and, (past denial) satisfied her audiences more completely than Malibran herself—Madame Pasta's successor —had done,—to the point of making some among them speak of her as of one on whom Madame Pasta's mantle had fallen.

Well—this new Garcia, with a figure hardly formed—with a face which every experience and every year must soften and harmonize—with a voice in no respect excellent or equal, though of extensive compass—with an amount of sensitiveness which robbed her of half her power—came out in the grand singers' days of Italian Opera in London, and in a part most arduous, on every ground of memory, comparison, and intrinsic difficulty—*Desdemona* in "Otello." Nothing stranger, more incomplete in its completeness, more unspeakably indicating a new and masterful artist, can be recorded than that first appearance.—She looked older than her years: her frame (then a mere

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reed) quivered this way and that; her character-dress seemed to puzzle her, and the motion of her hands as much. Her voice was hardly settled, even within its own after-conditions; and yet—paradoxical as it may seem—she was at ease on the stage;—because she brought thither instinct for acting, experience of music, knowledge how to sing—and consummate intelligence. There could be no doubt with anyone who saw that *Desdemona* on that night, that another great career was begun.

Her first song in that opera, an air introduced to replace the original air by its composer—which is weak, besides being identical with one in "La Donna del' Lago"—placed her extraordinary vocal preparation past dispute, the *scena* being one of as much difficulty as ingenuity,—written by Signor Costa.—In the second act, her treatment of the agitated movement in the *finale*, which precedes the startling and terrible entrance of *Desdémona's* father, was astounding in its passion, and the brilliancy of its musical display, if considered as forming part of a first performance of one so young. All the Malibran fire, courage, and accomplishment, without limit, were in it,—but something else beside, and (some of us fancied) beyond these.

This first performance, however, seized the musicians more powerfully than it fascinated the

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public. To be real, to be serious, to be thoroughly armed and prepared—to be at once young and old, new and experienced—is not enough. Particular qualities are not to be dispensed with in England, when the public mind is in a certain state.—The absence of regular beauty can sometimes, but not always, be forgiven. Then, this young girl had another drawback, in the very completeness of her talent. It was hard to believe that she *could be* so young, if capable to sing with such perfect execution, and such enthusiasm: nor had the voice from the first ever a *young* sound. Here and there were tones of an engaging tenderness, but, here and there, tones of a less winning quality. In spite of an art which has never (at so early an age) been exceeded in amount, it was to be felt, that Nature had given her a rebel to subdue, not a vassal to command, in her voice.—From the first, she chose to possess certain upper notes, which must needs be fabricated, and which never could be produced without the appearance of effort. By this despotic exercise of will, it is possible that her real voice—a limited *mezzo-soprano*—may have been weakened. Unless the frame be more than usually robust, the process (as I have said elsewhere) is always more or less perilous.—But, in these days, every one will sing *altissimo*;—basses where tenors used to disport themselves—tenors in re-

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gions as high as those devoted by Handel to his *contralti* — while *contralti* must now possess themselves of *soprano* notes, "by hook or by crook"—and *soprani* are compelled to *speak*, where formerly they were content to warble.—There is no good in lamenting over this tendency; there is small possibility of controlling it; but its influence on the art of singing is hardly to be questioned.

The impression made on our London world by the new singer was, at first, greater in the concert-room than on the stage;—and yet, there she had to measure herself against a no less accomplished mistress of the subtlest art of vocal finish than Madame Persiani. Among the most perfect things of their kind ever heard, were the duett-cadences in the duetts from "Tancredi," which they used to present—and these were mostly combined and composed by the girl—higher in taste than the similar ornaments which Malibran and Sontag had executed—though sometimes, like those, a little far-fetched.—I have never become wholly reconciled to the cunningly modulated instrumental cadences, which Madame Pasta first introduced, and which the Garcia sisters elaborated, in the less modulated music of the Italian school. The garniture may overlay, as much as it sets off, the material which it is meant to decorate.

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After one or two seasons of questionable success —not questionable appreciation—Madame Viardot disappeared from France and England, for a considerable period. She was to be heard of in Russia, in Germany, in Austria, as making her way upwards, always at first and afterwards most largely among the musicians, and the poets, and the persons of highest culture and intelligence. It was rumoured that she had ripened and chastened her powers as an actress. It was as perpetually rumoured that she had lost her voice,—the truth of the matter having always been, that every fresh audience had to become accustomed to the original defects of the voice.—At last, as has been noted, she came to our Royal Italian Opera, with the prelude of this mixed reputation, and with the disadvantage (again) of the wonderful early promise, or rather performance, being remembered.

Every circumstance connected with Madame Viardot's reappearance was badly devised, and attended by still worse fortune. She was to appear in "La Sonnambula,"—in this provoking comparison on every side,—with her recollected sister, with Madame Persiani, with Mdlle. Lind, whose best part was *Amina*. As if these things were not enough, the tenor, experienced in *Elvino's* music, and the delight of our public, with whom she was to have appeared, was "indisposed" when the even-

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ing came, (the word has many stage meanings), and there was found a Spanish gentleman, Senhor Puíg, who sung as Signor Flavio—used, it was said, to the opera—and in company with whom (I believe, without rehearsal) she had to go through her own ordeal.

That she passed through it so well, I have always regarded as a wonder. That the impression on a thoughtless general public was in part disappointment, in part confirmation of rumour, was no wonder. She was nervous; the rebel voice more than once refused to obey her command; she had to avoid acting, in order not to be put wrong by a stranger.—Still, the great artist was to be recognized by all who had eyes to see, and ears to hear. I have never seen a Sonnambulist heroine whose sleep was so dead as Madame Viardot's.—The warmth and flexibility of her execution, throughout marked by new touches, told in her first and her last air, (though the *rondo*, to be just, has been sung by no one so well as by Madame Persiani). What she was next to do, and where she was to be, in a theatre where every throne seemed to be occupied by those who sate firm, it was hard to divine.

The doubt was prolonged, and the fight made hard, by every possible circumstance and accident. But the resolute artist gained ground and won her

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way, in spite of rivalry, in spite of opportunity denied.—When beyond the walls of the theatre, her resources were seen to be boundless—to embrace every language to which Music is sung, every style in which Music can be written, whether ancient or modern—severe or florid—sacred or profane — strictly composed or nationally wild. — Without tediously drawing out a list, it may be asserted, that nothing comparable to its length and variety is on record in the annals of singers — save, as may be seen, in the achievements of Sontag.

It was not till "Les Huguenots" was given, "on command," (an opera, as has been said, then avoided with aversion by all the Italian artists), that Madame Viardot, placed in her right position, and in music till then neglected, because ill-rendered here, established a reputation different from, and superior to, that of any other *prima donna* within the compass of these recollections.—The effect which was to be produced in it, seemed to strike conviction that the opera was not so much "foolishness" into Madame Grisi;—who subsequently, in consequence of Madame Viardot's deferred arrival, appropriated the part, and, with it, took as tradition some of her predecessor's inventions—especially those of listening terror, in the striking conspiracy-scene.— Something of the kind Madame

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Alboni had done, by copying one of Madame Viardot's changes in one of her favourite show-pieces, the "Cenerentola" *rondo*. The above is history—not dispraise to the imitators—but, however, due to the inventor,—the latter a figure, in Art as in Science—alas!—how often unfairly overlooked.

I have elsewhere adverted to Madame Viardot's admirable performance of a character unbecoming to her voice—that of *Rachel*, in M. Halévy's "La Juive." The music of that opera has been unfairly depreciated in England, and her acting in it was passed over, save by the few.—Her other great success, then, in England, was in M. Meyerbeer's "Prophète,"—an opera so thoroughly identified with herself, and so animated by her probable performance of a character (however improbable) high-toned and new in an opera, that it has lived a languishing life here since she has been withdrawn from it,—as compared with the former work.—The intrinsic merits of this opera will be discussed elsewhere; but here it must be repeated that our artist could set on the scene a homely burgher-woman, with only maternal love and devotion to give her interest, and could so harmonize the improbabilities of a violent and gloomy story, and of music too much forced, as to make the world, for a while, accept it for its composer's masterpiece. When the story of

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M. Meyerbeer's operas is finally written, it may prove that he was as much indebted to Madame Viardot for suggestion in "Le Prophète," as he was to Nourrit in "Les Huguenots."

This originating faculty, — in spite of many drawbacks, which are never to be lost sight of, by those who admit while they admire,—accompanied by great versatility, gives Madame Viardot a place of her own, not to be disputed. It has been proved, once, twice, thrice—to name a second example, in the calm Oratorio-music given by Signor Costa to the Child of the Temple, *Samuel*, in his "Eli," the tone of which, not easy to take without becoming insipid, has been copied by every other singer. It was proved by her bringing out, in the same Oratorio-world, the recitative of *Jezebel*, in "Elijah," which, till Madame Viardot declaimed it, had passed unnoticed.—It has been proved, once more, and perhaps most significantly of all, in her latest and most arduous undertaking—the revival of Gluck's "Orphée," and the triumph of it in modern Paris, as beyond any triumph which the most sanguine and enthusiastic lover of the ancients could have anticipated. It is something to have lived to see such an event, in musical days during which Signor Verdi is King.

My strong conviction it has long been, matured by study and experience, that Gluck is as truly

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Lord and King of serious musical Drama, as Handel is of Oratorio.—As an illustration in music of the power of Music, "Orphée" may stand face to face with "Alexander's Feast." Of the two works it is the one less marked by Time. Patched, altered, transformed, at first—written (it may be) in haste and carelessness—there is no other opera, in the world's long list, which, with merely three female voices and a chorus, can return to the stage like this, in days like ours, to make the heart throb and the eyes fill.—The scene of *Orpheus* with the Demons—his lament over *Eurydice*, when she is a second time reft from him—have never passed out of memory as concert-music; but who, till the other day, bethought him of the sadness of the funereal introduction—or the more resistless fancy and pathos of the scene in the Elysian Fields?—What, in tenderness and delicious melody, can exceed the chorus of the beatified Shades, who first console *Orpheus* unseen, and then place the hand of the wife, given back to Life and Love, in *his* hand?—There is nothing in the range of Drama or Poetry — not even the burial of *Ophelia*—neither the dirge over *Fidele*, in "Cymbeline"—more affecting than this simple chorus: there is nothing of the same tone in Opera to equal it. The awful and menacing wrath of the infernal warders of the Land of Shadows, and their resistance to Love, stronger than

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Death—gradually yielding to the charm of his persuasions, might, I verily believe, be more readily produced, than those quiet bars of melody and harmony combined.—Even in recollection—as the holiest aspects of Nature do—as does some real emotion of past times, all the more touching because of its quietness and unexpectedness—it moves me beyond the power of description by epithet.

To dwell on the selectness and delicacy of Gluck's orchestral writing (a merit too largely overlooked in him)—to point out how his devices as well as his melodies have been reproduced — what they have suggested—would lead into tedious specifications and comparisons. It is more to the purpose to insist on the extreme difficulty of his music; difficult, because the finest union of poetical conception and musical skill, and dramatic truth without a shade of exaggeration, are rare; difficult, as are *Miranda*, and *Perdita*, and *Volumina*, for the actress. It may be doubted whether such a perfect representative of *Orpheus* ever trod the stage, as Madame Viardot.—The part, originally written for an artificial Italian *contralto*, was subsequently transposed so as to suit a high tenor French voice. That either Guadagni or Legros can have satisfied the eye, may be also doubted. The Frenchman, we know, was affected and grimacing in his action. As personated by Madame

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Viardot, it left nothing to desire. Her want of regularity of feature, and of prettiness—helped, instead of impairing, the sadness and solemnity of the mourner's countenance; the supple and statuesque grace of her figure gave interest and meaning to every step and every attitude. Yet, after the first scene, (which recalled Poussin's well-known picture of "I too in Arcadia"), there was not a single effect that might be called a *pose*, or a prepared gesture. The slight, yet not childish, youth, with the yearning that maketh the heart sick, questioning the white groups of Shadows that moved slowly through the Elysian Fields, without finding his beloved one; the wondrous thrill of ecstacy which spoke in every fibre of the frame—in the lip quivering with a smile of rapture too great to bear—in the eye humid with delight, as it had been wet with grief—at the moment of recognition and of granted prayer;—these things may have been dreamed of, but, assuredly, were never expressed before. Such perfect embodiment of feeling and fable can hardly be looked for twice. —There could be no second group of *Niobe!*

Further, the peculiar quality of Madame Viardot's voice—its unevenness, its occasional harshness and feebleness—consistent with tones of the gentlest sweetness—was turned by her to account with rare felicity, as giving the variety of light and

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shade to every word of soliloquy, to every appeal of dialogue. A more perfect and honeyed voice might have recalled the woman too often to fit with the idea of the youth.—Her musical handling of so peculiar an instrument will take place in the highest annals of Art.—After the mournful woefulness of the opening scenes, the kindling of hope and courage, when *Love* points the way to the rescue, were expressed by her as by one whom reverence had tied fast, but who felt that its law gave freedom to the believer—her *bravura* at the end of the first act (the interpolation of which was sanctioned by Gluck, though the music is Bertoni's, or Guadagni's—at all events, not his own) showed the artist to be supreme in another light—in that grandeur of execution belonging to the old school, rapidly becoming a lost art. The torrents of *roulades*, the chains of notes, unmeaning in themselves, were flung out with such exactness, limitless volubility, and majesty, so as to convert what is essentially a commonplace piece of parade, into one of those displays of passionate enthusiasm, to which nothing less florid could give scope.—As affording relief and contrast, they are not merely pardonable—they are defensible; and thus, only to be despised by the indolence of the day, which, in obedience to false taste and narrow pedantry, has allowed one essential branch of art to fall into disuse.

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How completely Madame Viardot effected this marvel, was shown in a scene of which I was eye-witness. When "Orphée" was given at the Royal Italian Opera in 1860 (not well given, though with some effect, thanks to Gluck's music), the *Orphée* of the *Theatre Lyrique* in Paris, then in London, sung to a circle of amateurs and Opera-frequenters this stupendous *bravura*. "Why was this cut out at Covent Garden?" was the question which went round when the plaudits had ceased. —The air had *not been* suppressed, but had been toiled at by one without comprehension of its quality, or means to work it out.—Here it had passed without recognition.—The singer had imitated a few of Madame Viardot's attitudes: had followed some of her readings; but this exhibition of the sorcery which knows where to find gold, by the aid of divination, purpose, and science, was above her reach.

It would have been impossible to have spoken of Madame Viardot's peculiar career—begun, carried through, and continued under difficulties —and to have omitted mention of her *Orpheus*, though it has not been presented to the public in London, and though, to dwell on it, I have been led beyond the precise limits of my subject.

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THE YEAR 1849.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"Norma," "La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "La Favorita," "Linda."—*Donizetti.* "Robert."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni," "Le Nozze."—*Mozart.* "La Cenerentola," "Il Barbiére," "Semiramide," "La Gazza Ladra," "Otello," —*Rossini.* "I due Foscari."*—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Alboni. Van Gelder (Giuliani).* Parodi.* Lind. Rossi-Sontag.—MM. Gardoni. Beletti. Lablache. F. Lablache. Bordas.* Coletti. Calzolari.* Bartolini.*

BALLETS.

"Le Diable à Quatre." "Electra."*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Carlotta Grisi. Rosati. M. Taglioni.

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THE YEAR 1849.

SIGNOR ROSSINI'S music, which had been all but banished from Her Majesty's Theatre for a couple of seasons (Mademoiselle Lind not being, apparently, at ease in his operas), returned there this year, in consequence of changes in the company, which rendered performances of the newer refectory not attractive. Signor Verdi's star (as may be seen) had waned—not to brighten in England until his real popularity arrived in "Il Trovatore," and (more's the discredit!) "La Traviata."—There was no attempt to promise or to produce any new work. The thing to be done, clearly, was to "keep the theatre going," in some manner or other.—It was no longer a case of art, but of artists.

The return of Madame Sontag to the stage—as one of the most remarkable events in the biography of singers—claims a separate notice.—Another

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curious appearance was made in the person of Mademoiselle Parodi.—Of this young lady persons conversant with the theatres across the Alps had been hearing for some years.—It had been told them that she was the tragic singer on whom Madame Pasta had let fall her mantle—that she had been watched, cherished, counselled, approved, by that admirable artist.—The supremacy of the departed Queen of musical tragedy has, by the way, been in nothing more remarkably displayed, than by the manner in which her approval has been fictitiously worked to recommend inferior singers about to cross the Alps, before they have arrived.—It seemed and sounded like disloyalty and scepticism to all that is most real to venture a word, thought, or line of dispraise, in regard to the woman of whom Madame Pasta was said to have said "that she was destined to succeed her."—I have known in my time, at least, half a score of such heroines.

Mademoiselle Parodi, however, was something better than the ordinary pretenders. — She had sang a few times at Milan, or near it, with uncertain effect—but such fact tells nothing from a distance.—The assurances, again and again repeated (and this time from no sources open to suspicion) excited in many—myself among the number—the keenest curiosity and expectation.

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To those who had never heard or seen Madame Pasta, Mademoiselle Parodi appeared, on the stage, strange-looking, yet rather handsome — having a voice steadily out of tune; and a certain largeness of style, which was offered to conceal the want of thorough training. To those who *did* recollect that great artist, the appearance of Mademoiselle Parodi was painfully tantalizing. One who wrote at the moment compared it to the China plate sent home from China by the manufacturers there, who, having found a crack in the pattern plate, reproduced, with painful conscientiousness, the crack throughout the service commissioned from them. I find the simile recurs to me irresistibly when I am recollecting Mademoiselle Parodi, in reference to my distinct recollections as compared with those of the mighty and impassioned original artist whose career she aspired to reproduce.—There was something of the grand conception, something of the excellent declamation of her predecessor, in this young lady's performances — something of preparation, which separated her from the thoughtless and shapeless girls who are now to be seen flying at the highest stage occupation; but there was something, too—in itself, and finally fatal—of the double.—The voice was, absolutely, like Madame Pasta's broken and incomplete voice. Like hers, it was husky—like hers, it was out of tune; only,

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this time, from first to last.—The original *Norma* and *Medea* could so excite herself, during the course of a performance, that, towards the close of it—even when all means seemed to be gone—her magnificent power to move and to satisfy were revealed without a drawback. For those minutes it was well worth any one's while to wait.—Mademoiselle Parodi had all the organic defects of the elder woman—some of the instincts which encouraged us to fancy that the cloud that wrapped her in the outset might clear off. But the cloud never cleared. She presented a singular imitation of Madame Pasta's voice out-of-tune, and taste in ornament and step and smile —till the last;—all the more singular, because she was obviously no mocking-bird, bent to mimic the song of somebody else; but a sincere and careful artist. I have been told that once or twice in private—on the nights when her voice answered to her call—she sang admirably. Once, too, she produced a real effect on her audience; and in music for which no one could have imagined her fitted—I mean the sea-song in "La Tempesta" of M. Halévy.

We had now come to a time at which the supply of Italian Opera with Italian singers could no longer be counted on; and when the names of French and German and Belgian artists began to figure largely in the *programmes* of the year. Madame

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Van Gelder, who sang as Madame Giuliani, was a well-trained artist, with by no means a disagreeable voice—a fairly good second lady.—M. Bordas was a thoroughly untutored vocalist, with no presence, no dramatic power,—a man only to be remembered by his name on a list.—The only other singer worth a word was Signor Calzolari, with a light tenor voice, somewhat worn, but capable of some execution,—the last singer (till the other day, when M. Belart arrived) who has not been obliged deliberately to omit a large portion of the brilliant passages in Signor Rossini's lighter music. When I have, of late, heard this and the other bawler (to whom Nature had given means to work withal) extolled as a singer in the "grand style," because of his incompetence and inflexibility, I have been, as often, whimsically reminded of the "City Madam" (no fictitious *Mrs. Harris*), but a real mother with an actual daughter, who said, with a delicious pride in her hope of the family, "She's a dear, true English child—*she* won't learn French."

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THE COUNTESS ROSSI.

THE career of Henrietta Sontag, born at Coblenz, on the Rhine, in 1805, the child of actors, was one so singular in its chances and changes, that, had she not been beautiful and fascinating as a woman, and the greatest German female singer of the century, there is enough in its vicissitudes to furnish matter for a romance.—To her consummate charm and merit as an artist justice has not yet been done.

She cannot have enjoyed that perfect vocal education by which singers more favourably circumstanced have profitted. Nature, however, had given her a *soprano* voice of rare and delicate quality, with a sweetness which, in my memory, was only shared by* two voices so delicate as hers,

* Those of Madame Stockhausen, and Madame Cinti-Damoreau.

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and which I have never heard in the voice of any other German woman, be it strong or small. Though not precisely rich, it was mellow in tone.—The compass of it was two perfect octaves, with a note or two more.—This voice was trained principally at the Conservatory in Prague; but the child who began stage-life when she was six years old, in the "Donau-weibchen" of Kauer, had that sort of indomitable persistence in herself (gentle as she looked, with her blue eyes, and her pale brown hair) which goes far to make amends for insufficient training.—She must have early made herself, or been made a musician; for among the feats of her early time was the singing the part of *The Princess* in Boieldieu's "Jean de Paris" (a favourite opera in Germany) at a moment's notice. But hers, at first, was not the talent which seems the most to seize her countrymen. They do not dislike exaggeration in singing, but call the same "hearty." The appreciation of beauty of sound in the human voice is sparingly given them.—Sontag was essentially a singer, not a declamatory artist.—Everything that she did must be presented by the agency of grace. As years drew on, emotion and warmth increasingly animated her performances; but when she began she could do little more than look lovely —display her beautiful voice, and careful finish— and be steady as a rock in her execution. Ob-

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viously both Nature and Grace had marked her out for a certain occupation; and thus it was by good chance that the girl arrived at Vienna during the time of Signor Rossini's triumph there; and the predominance of Italian opera; and while a singer so accomplished as Madame Mainvielle Fodor was still to be heard. — But though Henrietta Sontag's tendencies were towards all that is elegant and florid in Southern music, it must not be forgotten that for her the last great German opera—Weber's "Euryanthe"—was written. That he consulted her style more than it was his wont to flatter his singers, may be heard in the *finale* of its first act — and also in the duett with tenor of act the second—so curiously resembling in its melody one of Signor Rossini's "Tancredi" duetts.—Further, so consummate a musician was she found—so competent to grapple with the most harassing difficulties of unvocal vocal music—that she was chosen by Beethoven as the leading *solo* voice in his "Missa Solennis," the extreme difficulty of which has never been exceeded.—It may be questioned whether ever artist appeared before the public who, during her career, sang through such a wide range of music;—but her natural taste obviously directed her to Italian opera.—In this her greatest successes were won; both at Vienna and Berlin.—The people became fanatic

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in admiration of her.—The tale is not forgotten of a party of German youths drinking her health, at a joyous supper, in champagne, out of one of her satin shoes, which had been stolen for the purpose. The Continent presently rang with the name of one who was as much of a Faery Princess, as of a wonder—if half the tales that went round could be true.

And she *was*, indeed, lovely when she first dared the ordeal of measuring herself, in France and England, against the great Southern artists who sang in Italian opera.—In her springtime, the musical drama was not the polyglott world which necessity has latterly made it.—The taste of French and English amateurs was fastidious.—Many shared the Great Frederick of Prussia's indisposition to hear Mara, "because she was a German singer;" many more were prepared to criticize the beautiful young Rhinelander severely, as one who had been overpraised by national partiality.—She had, on her arrival in Paris, some imperfections to polish down; she was accused of being sometimes too violent in giving out certain notes; of mistaken method in her execution. She was found reserved, timid, and cold in her acting. But she made good her place among such great Italians as Pisaroni and Madame Pasta; and in rivalry of an artist no less astounding and redoubtable than Maria Malibran;—and

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with the excellent, modest sense of a true artist, she added such polish as was wanting to her singing; and some warmth to her personifications of such characters as *Desdemona* and *Donna Anna*. She is understood to have made Madame Pasta a subject of close and attentive study; and month after month, at all events, developed on the stage an amount of power the existence of which, at her outset, was doubted.—She never could transform herself into an impassioned tragedian; but by the spell of sensibility, taste, and propriety, and of her personal attractions, she established and advanced herself in public favour, under circumstances of no common difficulty.—In London, though enthusiasm did not get to the length of a shoe for a champagne-glass, it took forms no less characteristic of English idolatry.—The Sunday papers told of Dukes dying for her—of Marquises only waiting to offer her their coronets at her feet.—Royalty itself was said to have mingled in the dance.—Her dress, always exquisite, though too laboured, set fashions. Colours, and race-horses, were called by her name; and (not the least significant tribute to her fascinations) a fashionable publisher tickled "the Town's" curiosity by announcing as forthcoming "Travelling Sketches, by Mademoiselle Sontag!"

She had a secret, however; and, like other

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singers' secrets, it did not get into the Sunday papers. Everyone knows the mysterious *Romeo* to whom *Juliet's* faith is plighted, and for whose sake she has promised to leave the stage, so soon as the apron shall be full enough of gold to build the cottage in which Private Life is to dwell,—or else he is the infatuated nobleman, wailing the death of some ancestor with many quarterings on the family 'scutcheon, ere he dare best it with the bright "or azur" of Genius, brought in to enliven dull nobility.—A merry and a motley list could be drawn out of the expectant lovers of singers, who have only, in fact, existed in the heads of scandal, or of paragraph-mongers.—Henrietta Sontag *had* a real history of this class, to interweave into the story of her artist-career,—and a history longtime secret and unsuspected. There *was* a young Italian nobleman to whom she was betrothed, waiting till their united fortunes should justify their marriage—and she smiled, and sang, and said "No" to everybody and to everything —and, it may be averred, had never written a word of the advertised Sketches — and in the very freshest hour of her youth, beauty, and triumph as a singer, suddenly disappeared from the stage into court-life, as the wife of a diplomate —ere long, an Ambassador. That all this might be done in all due order, the King of Prussia paid his

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tribute to her renown, and made his wedding-present by bestowing on her a patent of Nobility.—The daughter of the people was extinct.—She had her escutcheon and quarterings, and a "*von*" to her maiden name—as was only befitting one who was thenceforth to figure in court circles.

Twenty years passed—in Brussels, in St. Petersburg, in Berlin—but she was never forgotten. Her story, gossips said, was intended to be shadowed forth, "with a difference," in "L'Ambassadrice" of Scribe and M. Auber, written for the only equal she ever possessed — Madame Cinti-Damoreau. Travellers, (I may recall, among others, the lady of "the Baltic Letters,") able to penetrate the mysteries of august life, brought home tales, from time to time, of her popularity —of the preservation of her good looks—and here and there, somebody told of her singing.—Everyone, however, conceived her to be dead and gone for the public—past recall.

The troubles of 1848 broke out, however:—and Mademoiselle Lind having irrevocably left the stage, and having set sail for America, something must be done for the Haymarket Opera, which the Covent Garden Opera was pressing hard.—And one May-day, with as many flourishes as pen can make and epithet colour, out came the news that, "owing to family circumstances," the Countess Rossi had

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consented to resume her profession. What was more, forth came a small book, in green and gold, devoted to her former and more recent history,—and which, in so many plain words, pointed to the necessities which had prompted her return to Her Majesty's Theatre as a special instance of Divine interposition!! in favour of a deserving home of aristocratic entertainment!!!

These circumstances of her return to the stage must be dwelt on; for a more curious and noticeable event is not on Opera record. No revival has ever been made under circumstances of greater peril.—Every possible means of exhausting a theatre by success, had been resorted to in the popularity and departure of Mademoiselle Jenny Lind.—During the period of its duration, the voice of the public (as I have said) became rancorous and persecuting to those who considered her as a great singer where other great singers had been, but who did not consider her as the greatest of great singers who had ever been.—It was dangerous, in society, to offer a word of comparison on the subject.—It was as dangerous to be silent; when silence was construed as dissent, and dissent was assumed to be so much utter and interested malignity.—The old Opera days, so charmingly chronicled by Walpole, when Lady Brown (whose Sunday music scandalized so many) flew into rages

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at and forbid her house to such of her guests as did not rage with her in deification of her own peculiar *prima donna*, seemed to be revived—so true it is, that there is no past earthly folly or frenzy which may not be reproduced in any present generation.

Thus, however great was the stroke of good fortune which could replace the Swedish lady by an Ambassadress whom adverse fates compelled to reappear on the scene of her old triumphs, after twenty years of court-life — for herself — it was an adventure little short of desperate.—However the circumstances of her story might be worked out to its uttermost—however all honest people must have felt real sympathy for the mature woman — remembered as so charming in her girlish days—about to measure her present against her past self — it was all the more felt a more fearful hazard for her to measure her musical and dramatic accomplishments against those of a predecessor whose tantalizing disappearance from the stage had rendered her, on many grounds, more than ever an object of fanatical worship.

But Madame Sontag (such was to be now her name) had not slept during the score of years when Grisis, and Persianis, and Linds were coming and going.—She had never laid aside the care and culture of her delicious voice during her epi-

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sode of ante-chamber work and monotonous court splendour.—She sang in public, as an amateur, once or twice, for charitable purposes.—In private noble circles she was frequently to be heard. —The Berlin gossips, fifteen years ago, who seemed to resent the exaltation of a girl from among the people to a place of "state and ancientry," had many sharp stories of the willingness of the new-made Countess to sing at court-parties, if any other amateur appeared there who ran a risk of being found attractive.—There was a laughable tale of her thus breaking silence,—on the occasion of a French lady (not noble) appearing at Court whose *romances* had won her some social success,—and singing down her poor little rival, past chance of retrieval.—But who that knew Berlin fifteen years ago, does not know the enjoyed spite and bitterness of every disparaging story that could be there spread, so as to make artists hate and oppose each other, and circle sit in judgment on circle?*—Is it not proved at this very hour, by the turning out of the rag-bag of evil scandal hoarded up by a rag-picker, in his lifetime admitted to decent society as a man of letters—Varnhagen von Ense?—Is it not proved, in a no less significant form, by the avoidance of that real artist and nobleman by nature, Felix Mendelssohn, to settle among his own beloved family

* "Modern German Music," vol. i., p. 158.

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in that city of wicked talk?—There could be no doubt that the Countess Rossi's whole heart and soul were in the Opera; but I never found proved —and, during some acquaintance, I never traced in her,—that sort of spiteful rivalry which I have heard imputed to her.—She knew her own value: she was honourably anxious to have it owned—but I believe her to have been heart-sound and sweet-tempered:—a little vain—as her early career may explain—a little grand, as a singing Ambassadress of twenty years' standing may be permitted to be—but, in every fibre of her frame, an honest, real artist;—as such, willing to "let live," albeit very desirous to "live" herself.—Though part of the advertisement of her return was the coronetted Album handed to her, from which "the Countess" (as she was pointedly called) was intended to strike terror into plebeian audiences, when she appeared as a public concert-singer—though in private society (where she sang very sparingly, and then only as an amateur)—she was generally to be remarked as the most carefully-dressed, and most wearily elegant, among the crowd of aristocratic ladies,—the change was immediate, the pleasure was keen and vivid, when she could enter into some question of Music with any one more willing to discuss it than eager to compliment her.—Her eye brightened—her conversation (never peculiarly intellectual) became

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animated.—She was in her own world again—in her own sphere of legitimate charm and influence. The smile passed, and the face resumed its company-look of insipid suavity, if some Star or Garter lounged up, to talk the regulation nothings which a high-bred man of rank is allowed, in good society, to talk to one still a beauty and an ex-Ambassadress.—I cannot but think that she rejoiced in her return to the stage—anxious though the moment must have been for her and hers.

There was no need of misgiving on the occasion, at all events.—The first notes of "*Linda's*" *Polacca* were sufficient to assure every one who filled the theatre—some out of financial anxiety, some out of envious rivalry, some out of affectionate recollection, some out of mere curiosity—now that the artist was in her old place again, whether the woman had not lost too much of what the girl had been to make the step chargeable with vanity or unjustifiable cupidity.—But all went wondrously well. No magic could restore to her voice an upper note or two which Time had taken; but the skill, grace, and precision with which she turned to account every atom of power she still possessed—the incomparable steadiness with which she wrought out her composer's intentions — she carried through the part, from first to last, without the slightest failure, or sign of weariness—

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seemed a triumph.—She was greeted—as she deserved to be—as a beloved old friend come home again, in the late sunnier days.

But it was not at the moment of Madame Sontag's reappearance that we could advert to all the difficulty which added to the honour of its success. —She came back under musical conditions entirely changed since she had left the stage—to an orchestra far stronger than that which had supported her voice when it was younger; and to a new world of operas.—Into this she ventured with an intrepid industry not to be overpraised—with every new part enhancing the respect of every real lover of Music.—During the short period of these new performances at Her Majesty's Theatre, which was not equivalent to two complete Opera seasons, not merely did Madame Sontag go through the range of her old characters—*Susanna*, *Rosina*, *Desdemona*, *Donna Anna*, and the like—but she presented herself in seven or eight operas which had not existed when she left the stage—Bellini's "Sonnambula," Donizetti's "Linda," "La Figlia del Reggimento," "Don Pasquale;" "Le Tre Nozze," of Signor Alary, "La Tempesta," by M. Halèvy—the last two works involving what the French call "creation," otherwise the production of a part never before represented.—In one of the favourite characters of her predecessor, the elder

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artist beat the younger one hollow.—This was as *Maria*, in Donizetti's "La Figlia," which Mdlle. Lind may be said to have brought to England, and considered as her special property.—Not merely as displaying vocal art, but in point of dramatic intention, was Madame Sontag by much the higher of the two; and this in spite of her greater age. She was the more archly military in the camp—and in the lesson-scene of the second act,—where the reclaimed daughter of the Regiment has to endure the weariness of being trained as a fine lady—the outbreak of old habits and propensities, shown in her vulgarly tasteless finery, in her petulant behaviour, told in the very tones of her voice,—made as gay and real a piece of comedy as could be enjoyed.

With myself, the real value of Madame Sontag grew, night after night—as her variety, her conscientious steadiness, and her adroit use of diminished powers were thus mercilessly tested. In one respect, compared with every one who had been in my time, she was alone, in right, perhaps, of the studies of her early days—as a singer of Mozart's music.—In this she displayed a taste, a suavity, a solid knowledge, and yet a temperate liberty—the true style was wrought out—a style which, possibly, no mere Southern can ever acquire. She had the Vienna traditions. Traces of this have

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been shown in England by Madame Van Hasselt-Barth—by Mdlle. Jenny Lutzer (now Madame Dingelstedt)—and, later, by Mdlle. Anna Zerr—one of those excruciating high *soprani*, whose ungraceful screams, however correct or flexible as to notes, make the most patient people desire anodynes;—but the easy, equable flow demanded by Mozart's compositions—so melodious, so wondrously sustained—so sentimental (dare I say, so rarely impassioned)—that assertion of individuality which distinguishes a singer from a machine, when dealing with singers' music—that charm which belongs to a keen appreciation of elegance, but which can only be perfected when Nature has been genial—have never been so perfectly combined (in my experience) as in her. Her *Susanna* was, from first to last, a study—not altogether the *Susanna* of Beaumarchais, but wholly the *Susanna* of Mozart.

It is impossible, then, to rate the claims of this beautiful and accomplished woman too highly. She had not Genius—but she had Grace in no common degree of bounty; and with grace, that honourable and untiring desire to give her best, and nothing less than her best—which is more frequently found among Northern than Southern singers.—The latter are apt to have "tempers;" to sulk, or to lounge; to decline all duties that do not bring the reward of immediate applause: to rule, in short,

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by caprice. She ruled by constancy. Her respect for her public amounted to true nobility, which implies due consideration of others as well as of one's self.

But if her life (as I must think) had, on the whole, been a weary one—and this with no desire to make it such on the part of those who surrounded her—its close, after her return to the stage, was as painful a story as has been often told. What I have tried to present, in the above characteristics and recollections, as something without precedent, failed to strike the public as such—and this is no wonder. Audiences cannot, should not, be expected to weigh and wait, and take a series of performances in the aggregate, and consider beauties with reference to difficulties. In spite of her incomparable exertions to uphold and revive a tottering and exhausted theatre, the engagement of Madame Sontag was understood not to have fulfilled the expectations of those who had contracted it.—She had, however, to work out her contract, and, in so doing, to make acquaintance with artist-life under conditions which had no existence when she had quitted the stage. Then the rapid railway transport of our times, which enables the manager to transfer his apprenticed subjects to a fresh place each day, and to call on them for exhibition every night, had not been thought of.—This, however, in-

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cluding a Scottish tour during a most harsh winter, Madame Sontag now battled through bravely, and without adverting to its hardship—so especially severe for one with a voice so delicate as hers—and past maturity, moreover. Her best was to be done: for her art—for her family—for her manager.—I remember hearing her tell, with pretty fatigue (and, for once, some slight regret for the ease and luxury of her court-life), how, on the occasion of a railway accident, she had been compelled to struggle through the snow, on foot, for some miles, to arrive in time for her concert, with the coronetted book. Thiis, however, was got through.—When she was free from her English obligations, then came the wear and tear of a career in America:—where she had to present herself as successor to one in whose honour hotel-rooms had been garnished (by Mr. Barnum) with silver locks, engraved with Scriptural mottoes. Through America this remarkable artist steadily and gracefully sang her way; bespeaking no particular indulgence, but winning her audiences wherever she went. In an unfortunate moment, it fell to her lot to go down to Mexico. There the pestilence seized her, at the moment when her task, in one respect, was nearly accomplished—that of reinstating her family fortunes—when, possibly, the hour was fast coming at which even *her* quiet resolution would have

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made it impossible for her to fight with Time much longer.

Her name should be royally remembered in the noble family restored by her exertions. Her name is here respectfully commemorated—not as Countess Rossi, but as Henrietta Sontag.

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THE YEAR 1849.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"Massaniello."*—*Auber.* "La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Linda," "Lucrezia Borgia."—*Donizetti.* "Robert le Diable," "Les Huguenots," "Le Prophète."*—*Meyerbeer.* "Le Nozze," "Don Giovanni."— *Mozart.* "Semiramide," "Il Barbiére," "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Dorus-Gras.* Catharine Hayes.* De Meric.* Angri.* Grisi. Persiani. Corbari. Viardot.—MM. Mario. Massol.* Tamburini. Salvi. Marini. Sims Reeves. Tagliafico. Polonini. Ronconi.

Principal Dancer.

Madame Pauline Leroux.

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THE YEAR 1849.

"MASSANIELLO" was, at last, creditably performed in London, with Signor Mario for its hero (singing and looking the Neapolitan fisherman delightfully) —for its *Fenella*, Mdlle. Leroux, and for its other two principal characters, Madame Dorus-Gras and M. Massol,—another proof how, year by year, our foreign musical theatres have had more and more to draw on other lands than Italy for their singers. —Madame Dorus-Gras, though never able to lay by her nationality so as to group well with her playfellows—and though deficient in that last elegance, which distinguished Madame Cinti and Madame Sontag—was, nevertheless, an excellent artist, with a combined firmness and volubility of execution which have not been exceeded, and were

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especially welcome in French music, heard in a concert-room. On the stage she pleased less.—Her appearance was *not* significant. She was lifeless as an actress. She never mastered Italian —having never mastered French, owing to her Low-Country extraction. For all this, her *Alice* in "Robert" was excellent. She sung the opening song, "*Va dit elle,*" and the semi-Scottish *romance*, "*Quand j'ai quittai la Normandie,*" more thoroughly in the metallic, exact style which M. Meyerbeer's music demands, than any other singer whom I have heard attempt the part.—M. Massol, an effective baritone, less thoroughly trained than the lady, was found useful, but not interesting.

We had a Greek lady, too—Mdlle. Angri—in the place of Mdlle. Alboni,—one to whose talent the epithet of eccentric must be applied. Her voice, a *contralto*, was unique in its quality,—even, easy, hollow, without lusciousness—a little hoarse, without much expression—but it was a voice that *told*. Its volubility was remarkable; there was no difficulty that she did not play with, frivolously and rapidly, as a person half-tamed might do, endowed with amazing natural powers, to whom composure is impossible.—Her face and figure lent themselves well to disguise. She wore "doublet and hose" without the slightest diffidence of sex—without, however, the slightest

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immodesty. She had instincts for acting. But there seemed to be something uncouth and wild which interposed betwixt her and her English audiences.—She never got their sympathy; on the contrary, she tired, as those who fail to fulfil the expectations they have excited must always end in doing:—and she left the Italian Opera, after a season or two, without leaving behind her an impression or a regret.—The other *contralto*, Mdlle. de Meric, though younger, worse assured, and with much less accomplishment, promised better; but she, too, passed away, and now, I believe, sings no more in public.

The appearance of Mr. Sims Reeves, in Italian Opera, did not as yet bear out the promise made by him in English, on his immediate return from Italy, nor foreshow the career since ran by this admirable and real singer.—He failed to "fall on his feet" on the foreign Opera stage in England—why, it would not be altogether easy to explain: in part, no doubt, from the disinclination which certain audiences have "to their own people"—from the same causes as barred our Italian Opera stage to the last of the Kembles, who had been the delight of Naples.—A study of our English fastidiousness, relieved with corresponding laxity in allowance, would be worth the care of any historian of manners.

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It was less singular that Miss Catharine Hayes —who for a while had been a leading favourite at *La Scala* in Milan, and aspired to the same position here—should be disappointed in her attempt. We had not, as yet, descended to the level at which one so irregularly cultivated as she proved herself to be, could appear a finished artist. But of her separate mention has been already made.

In 1849, two other foreign artists appeared for the first time elsewhere in London, who have since figured largely in Italian Opera. The one was a Belgian lady, Mdlle. Charton,* whose agreeable voice and talent made her acceptable in light French operas to all listeners whose Parisian experience was not great, and who did not mark in her that provincial air, which must be cast aside ere its wearer can take first rank in a metropolis.—The other was Herr Formes, who, as one of a bad German company, created a real sensation by his singing in "Die Zauberflöte."—Never was man endowed with a more majestic voice and presence to work with in his art than he.—I can call to mind no other deep bass voice, so deep, so sonorous, so equal as his, in 1849,—nor did I ever see anyone move with more dignity than did he, then, as *High Priest*.—From the first, he possessed himself of the sympathies of

* (March, 1862)—now Madame Charton-Demeur, and one of the company of the Italian Opera there.

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the English,—who have always been as ready to welcome German, as they have been to mistrust French singers. From one so young, so striking in appearance, so obviously endowed with that original talent for the stage which no study can altogether replace, there was much, indeed, in those days to be expected—especially at a period when the supply of Italian singers was beginning to fall so short.

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M. MEYERBEER'S OPERAS.— "LE PROPHÈTE."

THE production of "Le Prophète" in Paris and in London was the musical event of the troubled year 1849. The reader may be spared retrospect of the extent to which curiosity had been tormented during thirteen years, in regard to this third grand French opera by M. Meyerbeer.— Enough to say, that "the golden time" in which so serious and singular a work might have set forth to its fullest effect, was lost, by its composer's hesitation in confiding it to the French theatre during the reign there of M. Duprez. The part of *John of Leyden*—lover, son, fanatic, penitent—has never been played and sung, as it might and would have been by that splendid musical and dramatic artist.

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The opera is itself worth a study, as an experiment, till then untried, to transport musical Drama across its ordinary frontier.—A tale which religious and political fanaticism pervades as an element,—would have tempted few composers save the writer of "Les Huguenots."—But, having touched the Puritan in *Marcel* (a figure not till then indicated in Music*), it was natural that he should be tempted further still in the same little-trodden path. It was natural that he should forget, that what seduces the artist in his study, does not, always, equally delight a mixed audience.—The three Anabaptists grouped in place of a single bass voice, were, because of their sombre nature, a perilous novelty.—Neither is Fanaticism, whether it be sincere or hypocritical, a subject readily to be treated in Music,—because that demands simpler and less unmixed emotions, be they strong or gentle, for its themes.—There is no distinct intimation of irony possible in the art.—It is difficult to intimate that a coronation which is taking place is one of a self-deluded Impostor, not of a real King;—it is

* It is among the anecdotes which many believe, (and in some degree confirmed by the letters just published), that Mendelssohn forbore finishing and giving to the world his "Reformation Symphony," (a work destined for an anniversary), in consequence of finding the well-known Lutheran psalm-tune destined to figure there, appropriated by M. Meyerbeer.

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hard to convey the impression of semi-insanity, in the Canticle with which a religious chief rouses his superstitious soldiers from mutiny, and moves them to impossible feats.—The actors, and the frame-work of the story, must here help the musician.—M. Meyerbeer has, possibly, gone as far as man can go, by characterization in Music, to surmount the difficulty; but that, in so doing, he has introduced an element of strain and exaggeration into his opera, the effect of which is felt by many among his audience who do not trouble themselves to search out the cause—is true.

"Le Prophète"—again—is peculiar, as being the first serious opera relying for its principal female interest on the character of the Mother.—The Wife reigns as Queen in "Alceste" and "Fidelio;"—the outraged revengeful woman, in "Medea" and "Norma;" but the pathos of maternal tenderness and devotion, pure of all passion, had been hitherto unattempted, till it was tried in this opera.—This selection even in this case largely arose from chance. In the first draft of the drama, it has been said, the Prophet's love, wrested from him by the Despot, was destined to be the heroine,—and, as the drama stands, she still awkwardly crosses the impassioned scenes of its fourth and fifth acts with the purpose of retribution. But the character was virtually effaced from the moment that Madame

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Viardot was associated with the production of the tragedy; since it was felt by author and musician how admirably she was fitted by Nature to add to the Gallery of Portraits a figure which as yet did not exist there.—Her remarkable power of identification with the character set before her, was in this case aided by person and voice. The mature burgher-woman, in her quaint costume; the pale, tear-worn devotee, searching from city to city for traces of the lost one, and struck with a pious horror at finding him a tool in the hands of hypocritical Blasphemy—was till then a being entirely beyond the pale of the ordinary *prima donna's* comprehension; one to the presentation of which there must go as much simplicity as subtle art—as much of tenderness as of force—as much renunciation of Woman's ordinary coquetries, as of skill to impress all hearts by the picture of homely love, and desolate grief, and religious enthusiasm.

It is not too much to say, that this combination to its utmost force and fineness was wrought out by Madame Viardot, but (the character being an exceptional one) to the disadvantage of every successor.—There *can* be no reading* of *Fides* save

* It may be told, now, how an amateur lady of some musical repute *did*, absolutely, go to the *Fides*, then in full glow of the first success of "Le Prophète," to present her with *her* new lights of the reading of the part.—But

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hers; and thus, the opera, compared with "Les Huguenots," has languished when others have attempted her part — either by copying, as did Mdlle. Wagner and Madame Stoltz — or by attempting, as did Madame Alboni, to carry it through musically, leaving all the dramatic passion and power wisely untouched.

The above peculiarities, then, have had an influence on the present popularity of "Le Prophète," an influence neither inconsiderable nor unjust. Whether any state of the stage will arrive at which they will be thought merits, not drawbacks, remains for others to see.—Meanwhile, it is true that they have somewhat chilled admiration for the remarkable musical beauties which the opera contains—some among these separate beauties more attractive than any in "Les Huguenots."—I will not dwell on the droning chaunt of the preaching Anabaptists, but recall the charming *duettino* of the two women in the first act (as fresh and real as its writer's chamber-duett, "*Mère Grande*"); in the second act, on the song of *John of Leyden*, the *arioso* for *Fides*, "*Ah, mon fils*,"

where will not self-glorification stop? There have been such things seen, as an authoress of the Sister Island instructing Mdlle. Taglioni how to dance an Irish jig!—and *I* have seen Mr. Rogers, the poet, "walk a minuet," in remembrance of what had been done in his presence at Paris, with Marie Antoinette of France as the lady!

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and the commencement of the quartett of men which closes the act.—The entire movement may have been an attempt to out-do the *terzetto* of men in "Guillaume Tell,"—even as the "*Blessing of the Swords,*" in "Les Huguenots," may have been suggested by the Swiss conspiracy-scene of Signor Rossini's opera; but the opening is excellent, clear, decided, and altogether M. Meyerbeer's own.

Then, in the third act of "Le Prophète," the relief given to its heaviness (as I have said) by the dance music, amounts to a master-stroke of genius. There is nothing more varied, more piquant, more original, more picturesque, than the music of this *ballet*,—prefaced by the chorus with the arrival of the Skaters—followed out by the Waltz—by the exquisite *Redowa* (in which a touch of the rhythm of the minuet in "Les Huguenots" occurs)—and after the Ice Quadrille, which bears incomparable company to the evolutions on the stage,—by the Galop, when the rout of peasants and suttlers light their lanterns and start homewards.—It is easy to stigmatize these things in Opera as empirical; but who can stop or stay, if the intrinsic fascination of them makes its print in the mind?—I was brought back to recall this excellent beauty of episode in M. Meyerbeer's work, while listening to the no less delicious Greek chorus with dance, "*Parez vos fronts,*" in Gluck's "Alceste."—In a

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sombre story, such as is "Le Prophète," the musical light and cheerfulness let in (supposing opera-conventions admitted—and what is Opera but conventional, even as regards Drama?) are as precious as brilliant.

Afterwards, before the false Prophet appears on the scene, comes the Revolt Chorus — turbulent, odd, broken (yet full of musical ideas), which passes scarcely perceived in the drama, but which is the best revolt, perhaps, on the musical stage,—the best preparation for the entrance of the false Prophet—resolute to quell the revolt—that could have been contrived.—Yet, in Paris, till the very last moment of producing the opera, everything was left under conditions of modification, till the great scene for the Prophet arrived. In Paris, the prayer in this was suppressed, by way of meeting the means and the powers of M. Roger. In London, where this was restored, a portion of the after-Canticle (containing most beautiful phrases), was retrenched, in consideration of Signor Mario's strength. As represented both by the French and the Italian tenor, the scene retains only half its power: as written, it lays an overburden on any possible Prophet.

In the fourth act—before the Cathedral scène comes, there is, still, the petition of the worn-out pilgrim, which is one of M. Meyerbeer's best *ro-*

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mances. But, in Paris more than, as yet, in England, the best of such petitions and *romances* cannot stop the action of a great drama in music without protest—and the song, therefore, can only be received as a preparation for the entry of the heroine into the Cathedral-scene. The duett which intervenes, betwixt the mother and the wandering bride of the false Prophet, is a forced piece of ingenuity. —Not so the grand scene which follows, and which virtually *is* "Le Prophète." No more superb example of musical effect exists in Drama. The March is gorgeous in its opening beyond precedent of stage-marches,—choicely rich in the melody of the *trio*. Then comes the organ behind the scenes, with the church-anthem (the latter as sanctimonious as the former was gorgeous), broken by the imprecations of the distracted woman, who hears the praises of the false Prophet;—her heart the while moved by the sacrilegious wickedness of him who has spirited away her son. Next follows the chaunt of the children with their censers (curiously lame in the second strophe)—all wrought up, with consummate art of climax, to the instant at which the false Prophet, having quelled a revolt—intoxicated, self-deluded, crowned—conceives himself—*is* to himself —Divinely inspired.—The thunderbolt falls, in the moment of terrible recognition. The wild appeal of the mother, bewildered by surprise and horror, and

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the weary, wearing yearning of months of pilgrimage; the more fearful struggle still, in the heart of the Impostor, with the knives of the fanatic fiends who have goaded him into the blasphemous crime, close at hand—all these is treated by M. Meyerbeer with the grasp of a giant, able to control the surge of the most tremendous and unlooked-for emotions.

This grand concerted piece, leading, by a chain of its writer's favourite modulations, to the climax of explosion in the scene of the false miracle, is well worth comparing, by those who study effect, with similar movements by Signor Verdi, as containing an example of the broken (or sobbing) phrase used, as expressive of suspense, to its uttermost.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that the pretended miracle, in which the Impostor pretends to restore reason to an insane stranger, and persuades his mother to deny his identity, should rely on the actors more than the music.—Such a situation is beyond the power of sound to express, let the transcendentalists say what they will.—And, indeed, it may here be told, that this scene might not have retained its present form had any other actress than Madame Viardot "created" (as the French say) its principal part,—remembering as I do, how, at the last rehearsals, not only every trait

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and turn of the situation were studied with anxiety, almost hesitation, by Scribe; how there were consultations about shortenings, total omissions; and how Ary Scheffer—that most poetical of modern religious artists, and passionately fond of music—watched its composition as though he had been painting a picture.

"Le Prophète" of London had a vast advantage over that of Paris, in the remarkable personal beauty of Signor Mario, whose appearance in his coronation robes reminded one of some Bishop-Saint in a picture by Van Eyck or Durer, and who could bring to bear a play of feature, without grimace, into scene of false fascination, entirely beyond the reach of the clever French artist, M. Roger, who originally sustained the character.—There can be nothing grander in combination than the sweep of the procession from the Cathedral, after the false miracle has been accomplished, with the "*Dominum salvum fac*" pealing behind the scenes from the organ, and the people shouting almost in adoration. It is a moment of pomp and splendour, never outdone in stage-music.—M. Meyerbeer is a composer by moments.

Here, however, "Le Prophète" might, and should, have ended, but for that inconvenient thing, poetical justice. The fifth act — though nothing is left unattempted which could serve

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the purpose of effect — is inferior throughout.— The grand air of parade with which it opens, howsoever mystified by Madame Viardot's amazing fervour, is queer and tormented as a song. The duett betwixt the mother who asserts herself, and the son who repents, comes too late in the story, and is, curiously, cut short at last, as if its composer had felt it misplaced.—The elaborate terzett, in which the lost love of the false Prophet reappears, is fierce, difficult, wholly ineffective, though obviously laboured, with the intention of making it one of the important pieces of the opera.—The last song at the banquet after the manner of *Sardanapalus*, where the false Prophet indulges in a voluptuous vengeance, and expiation for all the past evil done, and quits the scene—no penitent, but one who conquers his conquerors—with the festal wreath on his head, and the festal wine-cup in his hand,—does little essentially to redeem the feebleness of this act.—The catastrophe belongs to the scene-painter and the stage-manager. It is not because the Bacchanal is vulgarised, by its being so closely identical with an Irish street song—"*Paddy Carey*."—Such things have happened before, and will happen again. Handel used a Welsh air in his "Acis" — a Calabrian bag-pipe tune in his "Messiah."—It is because, in the working-up of the familiar phrases, the composer shows himself

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unequal to the situation,—as if the indecisions and changes of thirteen years' preparation (and half as many months of rehearsal), had left him without clear-sightedness, or distinct vigour, fit to close the long legend, probable or improbable.

The production of "Le Prophète" may be said to have saved the new Italian Opera-house,—then notoriously floundering in embarrassments, with a company which was a Republic, and, for the time, in a state of discontent amounting to anarchy.—Though the first performances were all that was incorrect and incomplete—though the three Anabaptists (without meaning any hypocrisy) sang as falsely as false Anabaptists can sing—though Miss Hayes was insecure, as, indeed, she was always in all new operas—and though Signor Mario had not mastered the difficult intervals of the miracle-scene —"Le Prophète" produced an effect not to be forgotten. It had seemed from the first, to some, that this might not last so long as the effect produced by "Les Huguenots,"—but the subsequent course of the opera has, till now, hardly justified the prophecy.—The charm of Madame Viardot's splendid personification wore itself out, because, I must repeat, of the stilted and untruthful nature of the situations. A year or two later, Madame Grisi—always active and intelligent in adopting what she

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had seen more original artists do—attempted the character, without success. Yet I fancy, that allowing for the want of one or the other actress, or even of one or other *Prophet* (the real one being yet to come),—and admitting the gloom of the story, and its limited fitness for Music,—this opera may keep its proportion and its place by the side of the more universal musical drama which it followed—at a very long interval.

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M. AUBER'S OPERAS.

CHARACTERISITICS.

THE musical dramas of M. Auber form, in every respect, a group too remarkable to be passed over. They have sparingly penetrated into Italy; but they have kept the German stage awake, and preserved it from death of the weary dulness and inanity which have fallen on it since Weber was laid to rest,—and they have been found pungently necessary in this country;—because here, though we have accepted Signor Verdi (with a protest), we have *not* accepted the swarm of second-hand composers in the manner of Signor Verdi, who seem able to cheer easy Italian audiences from Carnival to Carnival, and whose works die, as the saying is, "like flies."—On the other hand, M. Auber, as the type of modern French composers—not able to rise into serious music, and yet able to

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suspend attention, to charm the ear, and to satisfy the musician's mind by graces and delicacies entirely peculiar to himself—has become, I repeat, in some sort a necessity in England: — because here we have not yet arrived at the point of accrediting bad music for fashion's sake—though we have permitted the entry of very paltry musical executants, who have arrived and traded under false colours.

The life of this noticeable composer has been a singular one. He has never, apparently, been disturbed with an idea, or a curiosity, beyond the barriers of Paris, — never seems to have troubled himself with aspirations for foreign fame—never with the idea that there were other theatres than those lying on the rival sides of the *Boulevards*.— He began to write late, as those precocious times of ours go,—when young gentlemen aged fourteen are to be received as so many new Mozarts (because Mozart wrote when he was fourteen). But when M. Auber began to write, he began to write as few of these new *quasi*-Mozarts begin—with a style of his own. It was neither Gretry, nor Boieldieu, nor Dalayrac, nor Monsigny, nor Berton, that M. Auber tried to write over again.—It was no emulation of German composers—it was no copying of Italian writers: it was true "French of Paris," and not French after the school of "Stratford atte Bowe;"

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and it was a "French of Paris" from which confused Germany,—and England, athirst for new operas, no matter whence they come,—have been very glad to derive aliment and variety.

If M. Auber has been always superficial as to feeling, he has been always wondrously elegant as to *costume*. There is no deep science in his "Massaniello," but there is the fervid South of Naples in it.—The unaccompanied Prayer in the revolt-scene—said to have been devised as a movement for a Mass,—the Tarantella,—the whole tissue of the work,—is something fiery, volcanic, alien to French nature and to French habits—something, withal, having a charm for the moment, and a lasting charm also.—Then, the form of the opera is wholly new,—an opera with its principal part a mimic one. Long as it is, it is slight.—It contains no grand *finale*—little, if any, elaborate concerted music—only one duett of high pretension (that duett urged and speeded, as if with flashes of fire, by the orchestra).—In short, the work is "trivial" (as we are now invited to accept of the epithet) for a grand opera,—full of ballads and dances, and of everything else which (it may be assumed) is impure, and improper, and idle;—nevertheless, under its own conditions, a real, permanent work, animated with the life of Genius—which will keep it alive.

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To no other work, on so large a scale, contributed by M. Auber to the *Grand Opera* of Paris, can the same praise apply.—"Gustave" is carefully wrought,—the opening and the close of its overture (under French conditions) delicious—the *Galoppe* unparagoned among *Galoppes*. Here, however, it may be seen that the master has spread himself over too wide a canvas. The passion is cold;—howsoever, not torn to tatters, as it has been since torn by Signor Verdi, the other day (1861), when aspiring to *re*-set the story (no modest proceeding).—In his "Lac des Fées," the capital Student-March which opens the overture —the faëry-chorus, which hangs in the ear with a fascination, even though the fairies be French fairies—the frank, bold, natural Hunters'-chorus —are all that can be recollected;—in "L'Enfant Prodigue," positively nothing.

But, then, in comic Opera, who has been comparable to M. Auber?—save Signor Rossini,—and he only once, in "Il Barbiére."—It has been the fashion to forget that Donizetti's "L'Elisir" was a *re*-setting of the book of M. Auber's "Le Philtre." —The French setting of the story (as I have said) is the better, brighter one, of the two.—Then, "L'Ambassadrice" (most illogically reputed to have been written at Madame Sontag's retirement from the stage and diplomatic marriage) has some comic

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numbers and graceful melodies, of the first quality. The lesson-scene, where the real singer endeavours to sing false, so as to conceal her singers' origin,—and subsequently becomes unable to resist breaking out into every imaginable brilliant passage (as a sort of compensation to herself for the slavery into which she had thrust her genius)—is one of the most legitimately delicious and whimsical things extant in the library of Opera of any time.

After "L'Ambassadrice" — *before* any other comic opera save "Il Barbiére" — comes "Le Domino Noir," to Scribe's happiest, gayest book,—written just at that juncture of a man's life when his power of contrivance is complete, and does not wander away into complication. To myself, twenty years ere I had thought of setting English words to it, the charm of that work was rivetting,—as one containing something bright, gamesome, delicate, courtly, which exists nowhere else. — The music of the first, or ball act, with its quadrille, and *bolero*, and waltz behind the scenes—with the delicious romance of the "*Dama Duende*" (Faëry Lady), who drops the nosegay close to the youth feigning sleep, in order that he may enjoy the enchantment—is incomparable—save in "Il Barbiére."—And incomparable is the supper-song of *Gil Perez*, the convent porter, in the second act, with its burden "*Deo gratias*."

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The third, or what may be called the Nuns' act, of the opera, has that fresh character,—(first, in the talk of a barn-yard, which men are told excites a society of secluded women,—next, in its religious, feminine feeling,) which are almost—altogether—without paragon.—It seems like yesterday that I heard Madame Cinti-Damoreau sing the *solo* with the harp accompaniment to the Canticle, which opens with the organ.—I can only record the effect by an epithet which may appear overstrained—it was *celestial.*

What, again, of its kind, can be more elegant, and, in places, more melodious, than "Fra Diavolo?"—which, again, is another of the world's *stock* pieces,—music to revel in, without any fatal seduction.—If he have been rarely deep, M. Auber is never dull. He falls short of his mark in situations of profound pathos (save, perhaps, in the sleep-song of "Massaniello.") He is greatly behind his Italian brethren in those mad scenes which they so largely affect. He is always light and piquant for voices, delicious in his treatment of the orchestra, and, at this moment of writing (1862)—though, I believe, the Patriarch of opera-writers (born, it is said, in 1784), having begun to compose at an age when other men have died exhausted by precocious labour—is for that very reason, perhaps, the lightest-hearted, lightest-handed man, still pouring out

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fragments of pearls and spangles of pure gold on the stage.

To return: I cannot but recollect the bright bits (no false jewels) in "Le Diamant de la Couronne," — the song for the heroine (with a burden)—the Spanish duett in the *bolero* style for the two women—I cannot but allude to the delicious prelude to the overture to "La Sirene"—to much of the music to "Lestocq"—to the laughing-song in "Manon Lescaut"—to the *piquant* overture to "Le Cheval de Bronze,"—a disappointing opera, however,—the disappointment of which has always seemed to me strange:—so quaintly comical is the story.

With all this, it is as remarkable as it is unfair that, among musicians, when talk is going round,—and *this* person praises that portentous piece of counterpoint, and *the* other analyses some new chord, the ugliness of which has led to its being neglected by most former composers,—the name of this brilliant man is hardly, if ever, to be heard. His is the next name among the composers belonging to the last thirty years, which should be heard after that of Signor Rossini — the number and extent of the works produced by him taken into account, and, with these, the beauties which they contain.

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THE YEAR 1850.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"I Puritani," "Gli Montecchi," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Il Matrimonio."—*Cimarosa.* "Lucia," "Don Pasquale," "L'Elisir," "Lucrezia," "La Figlia."—*Donizetti.* "La Tempesta."*—*Halévy.* "Medea."—*Mayer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Ernani," "I Lombardi," "Nino."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Parodi. Giuliani. Hayes. Rossi-Sontag. Frezzolini. Bertrand.* Fiorentini.*—MM. Michelli.* Beletti. Sims Reeves. Lorenzo.* Calzolari. Lablache. Baucardé.* Coletti. Gardoni.

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Ferraris. Carlotta Grisi.

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THE YEAR 1850.

THE downward course of Her Majesty's Theatre became more and more evident. Such hope as had been placed in the financial result of Madame Sontag's reappearance, died out.—She was heard with pleasure, but without enthusiasm. To myself, the amount of resource which she displayed, considering her age, seemed then, as now, marvellous,—a feat almost by itself in the history of Opera. But the public did not appreciate this as it deserved. The theatre was falling out of repute, and nothing could save it. None of the new singers excited the slightest sensation.—Signor Baucardé's voice, then very beautiful, already bore traces of ignorant cultivation and misuse.—Mdlle. Parodi continued to try for the succession to Madame Pasta, but in vain. —An English lady, Madame Fiorentini—the Irish lady, Miss Hayes — a French lady, Mdlle. Bertrand (a *mezzo-soprano* who wished to be a *con-*

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tralto)—had no better fate. There was, in fact, only one event during the season — the production of "La Tempesta," by MM. Scribe and Halévy.

I have always thought it an unhappy, though not an unnatural idea—that of arranging Shakespeare's "Tempest" in the form of an opera, to be set by Mendelssohn. — The success in faëry-land which he had gained in his "Midsummer Night's Dream" Overture, and which ought to have deterred every one from tempting him to a second enterprise of the kind, was the ground of the mistaken calculation, — a mistake, however, which will be fallen into again and again, so long as the world prefers repetition to novelty.—To start merely one difficulty—who *can* present the invisible *Ariel* on the stage, save as the outburst of a fountain, or as a flash of volcano-fire, or as lightning, or as the shooting of a star?—A mime *must* do it; and, however well it be done, (and we have seen it as well done as it *can* be done), the dream is gone.—The mime flying on stiff wires, be she, he, or it ever so tiny, ever so musical in voice, ever so tricksy in action, (a combination not the easiest in the world to realise), lingers long behind Imagination; or else, makes a gross piece of elf-work before an unpoetical —not therefore necessarily a coarse—public. Then, admirable as was Scribe's stage-manipulation —

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able, in less aerial visions, to make impossibility forgotten, to reconcile the sharpest discords, to keep up curiosity at the expense of common sense — he was, after all, a Frenchman. Now, the French are not to be trusted with Shakespeare, save under protest against the alliance.—They *will* clip, and curl, and oil the mane of the Lion; they *will* plane down and polish the crevices in the marble rock.—Whether it be a Dumas who fits up "Hamlet" with a new catastrophe of corpses round about the Ghost; or a Dudevant, who, out of the fulness of her æsthetic respect, mends "As you like it;"—or a Scribe, commissioned to do his best for dancers, singers, machinists, and composer—the result is always the same.—The story of "The Tempest," being at once too simple and dreamy as it stood, was to be rendered piquant by bringing out into coarse light what Shakespeare had only hinted in passing,—and by troubling with intrigues the poetical love of *Ferdinand* and *Miranda*. A "situation" was to be made out of the odious pursuit of *Prospero's* daughter by *Caliban*.—*Sycorax* was endowed with a machinery of witch-work.—A final suspense was contrived, in which the heroine was beguiled to the verge of taking her lover's life by the malicious persuasions of her demon enemies.

Though the drama itself had fascinated Men-

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delssohn, such conventional monstrosities as these thrust into it, by the most skilled of handicraftsmen, were rejected by him at once. He declared that he would not treat the opera-book as it stood—this, after his progress in the work, and its date of positive production, and pictures of the performers in character, had been advertised in the London papers!—and, in fact, he never composed a note to it; and threw the matter aside, in displeasure at the engagements entered into without his concurrence.

To supply his place was not easy,—especially for a management which had, by promise, confidently undertaken other duties for M. Meyerbeer. The number of possible successors was not large. Among skilled living musicians, there was no one to be found more available than M. Halévy.—If he was rarely fanciful, he was never vulgar—in his music; if seldom spontaneous, he was always ingenious, and wrote like one to whom all the resources of his art are known. A strange compound of facility with meagre imagination, he put forth to the world few works—few acts—few scenes—which arrest attention, or excite rapture.—Here and there, as in "La Juive," are touches of grandeur and emotion.—"Les Mousquetaires" breathes the air of the old French Court; "Le Val d'Andorre" has a rustic mountain-quaintness which is

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no less national; but this makes a brief list of notable pieces, the number and extent of their maker's productions considered.—In writing for England, M. Halévy was trammelled by conditions not calculated to nourish fresh and genial inspiration. He had for the second time to set Italian text (having in his early days written a "Clari" for Malibran);—to give life and colour to one principal character, in the form of dance and pantomimic music, in which his strength has never laid;—and, lastly, for his heroine to accept a singer, who, however incomparable as an artist, (and who so incomparable as Sontag?) must needs be spared and cherished within restricted limits as to compass and power, when her voice was to be provided for anew.

Produced under all these conditions, I have always felt that "La Tempesta" has more real merit than the world agreed to award it. If not at his best, the composer did himself no discredit in it, with those who can think and make allowance.—A prayer on board ship, in the impossible "Storm" prologue—a delicate chorus of elves, who time the flights of the dancing *Ariel*—the great *finale* to the second act, where *Caliban* is made to dance, brutified with wine, (including a frank, spirited sea-song and burden), in which, as I have said, Mademoiselle Parodi achieved her solitary English success—are

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all good, effective; and simpler than is the wont of their composer.—Yet, seldom, by comparison, did the freshness of a real and artless melody seem so deliciously welcome, as in Arne's "*Where the bee sucks,*" (since called by certain French historians "*Dr. Arne,*"—*an English melody*) — introduced among the pantomimic music, with as much tact as delicacy, by the Parisian composer.

All was done to produce "La Tempesta" worthily and well that Her Majesty's Theatre could do.—The author and the composer were summoned to England; and it is pleasant to remember with what a simple and sensible cordiality Scribe seemed to enjoy his visit and took his place in society.—Frenchman to the core, as every line of his hundreds of dramas proves, I remember no Frenchman whose nationality sate so easily on him in our country, as his. By neither look, word, nor sign, could it be inferred that any sight was strange to him — any usage difficult to reconcile with the Median and Persian statutes of French propriety. —Yet, he was neither flattering, nor insipid, so much as quietly gay—as self-assured as a well-bred man should be, and, therefore, considerate of the claims of everyone else. More cheerful and agreeable in intercourse no distinguished stranger and comic author could be.—(Your comic author is sometimes woefully dreary company in private.)

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Most pleasant, too, was Halévy, just gone (March, 1862), respecting whom, therefore, some personal and memorial words may be now permitted—and none the less, because the same would especially commemorate the agreeable impression made on all who knew him when in this country. He was singularly pleasing and intelligent in intercourse.—He was able to get rid of himself and his operas; to take a courteous and clear-sighted pleasure in all the novelties that London offers to Parisian eyes.—In fact, after having read the Academical Discourses which, as the Secretary of the *Institut*, it was his business to prepare, it may be now fairly said—what during his time of life and artistic production could not have been said, without gratuitous incivility—that he had more general intelligence than special genius.—The musical talent which he possessed was exclusively Parisian.—Anywhere else, save in the capital of France, I have never heard his stage-works without a feeling of short-coming and weariness.—The very peculiarities of his style — an extreme illustration of that musical suspense in which the French delight;—calling the same, "distinction" — demand French text, French actors, French audiences. I recollect the man, in both capitals, as tenfold more frank and attractive than his music.

The best singers in the company were assembled to give every possible strength and spirit to the

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drama. The *Caliban* of Lablache was alike remarkable as a piece of personation and of good taste. Had it not been so, the very hazardous scenes of the Monster's persecution of *Miranda* could not have been allowed on the stage.—In these, too, Madame Sontag's delicacy and reserve stood the drama in good stead.—The rest of the company had worked with no less good will; the music had been studied to a nicety rarely attained since Signor Costa had left the theatre. There was rich and tasteful scenery.—But "La Tempesta" could not live.—It was even received with less favour when it was subsequently given at the Italian Opera-house in Paris,—though there (by way of improvement), the last act was entirely omitted.—In England, as yet, Halévy has no public.

The disheartening lethargy which, in spite of every attempt to force applause, and to counterfeit the appearance of success, was creeping over the old Opera-house,—got hold of the *ballet*, too.—It seemed totally impossible to excite any interest or curiosity. But we still read, morning after morning, of triumph after triumph;—of enormous gains and successes; and the farce, melancholy as it was, was kept up for still a year or two longer, as bravely as if the end had not been from the first to be clearly foreseen.

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THE YEAR 1850.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"Massaniello."—*Auber.* "Lucrezia Borgia," "L'Elisir."—*Donizetti.* "La Juive."*—*Halévy.* "Les Huguenots," "Robert le Diable," "Le Prophète."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Moise," "La Donna del Lago," "La Gazza Ladra," "Otello."—*Rossini.* "Nabucco."—*Verdi.* "Il Franco Arciero."*—*Weber.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Castellan. Vera. De Meric. Grisi. Viardot.—MM. Maralti.* Formes. Tamberlik.* Zelger.* Massol. Polonini, Mario. Tamburini. Ronconi.

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THE YEAR 1850.

THIS was a season of splendid performances, memorable for many things. Year by year, the taste for grand Opera spread and increased in England. Year by year, the execution became finer and finer.

"Der Freischütz" in its Italian dress, and with recitatives excellently adjusted by Signor Costa, was relished by others more than by myself. German music and Southern words do not agree; nor has the experiment of translation ever succeeded, whether the work be one of Spohr's,—or "Fidelio,"—or this most German of German operas, a goblin tale. The terrors of the Wolf's Glen lose half their terror, when "done into Italian." Neither is recitative introduced in place of spoken dialogue often happy. A certain lightness and proportion are sacrificed, without any compensation in the form of solidity or grandeur being added. I have found this

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in M. Auber's "Fra Diavolo"—in M. Meyerbeer's "L'Etoile:"—in every other work thus *stiffened*—but in no case so heavily as in the case of the *ultra*-German popular legend. A like essay was made at Paris, with the incomprehensible recitatives of M. Berlioz;—but there, the result was virtually the same as here.—At Covent Garden, however, "Il Franco Arciero" enjoyed one advantage, in *not* being sung by Italian artists, Mdlle. Vera excepted.—The tenor, Signor Maralti, was Belgian.—The *Caspar* of Herr Formes has been always one of his favourite characters—the type of all he could do best in Opera, and with less left undone than in other parts.—Madame Castellan, on the other hand, was inefficient as the heroine;—her style having a certain restlessness, which was especially ill-fitted for German music.—She was always, moreover, slightly uncertain in tune.—On the whole, I have heard the opera produce far greater effect in a many fifth-rate German town, than it produced when given with the splendid band and chorus of Covent Garden Theatre.—There, it did not retain its place in the repertory.

On recalling this careful performance, in conjunction with the Italian version of "Oberon," presented during a later season at Her Majesty's Theatre, it seems clear to me, that the quality which makes a composer adaptable to a Southern language,

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whatever his country—be he a Bohemian Gluck, who could write an "Orfeo" for Italy—or a Saxon Hasse, who was voluminous and popular in his day as Donizetti – was more entirely wanting to Weber than to anyone so excellent as a melodist that could be named,—and this from no perverse antipathy, so much as from an original diversity of nature. Far from his entertaining the former, Weber has left concert *scenas* (as many, I think, as six,) to Italian text, in which the Italian form has been studied. But these are faded, flat imitations, without a trace among them of the spirit which inspired the dances in "Preciosa"—the *romance* of *Adolar* and the May-song in "Euryanthe"—and the delicious Mermaid tune, "*O'tis pleasant to float on the sea*," in "Oberon." Now, Beethoven was rugged and uncompromising enough; but, in what *he* wrote to Italian words—as the terzett "*Tremate*," and the *scena* "*Ah, perfido!*"—none of his freshness was lost — whereas, it may be said, that a suavity was imposed on him by the conditions of his language.—Since Weber's death, the Germans have not had an operatic melodist. — Schubert's *lieder*, in like manner, sound utterly unprofitable (even when a Mario adopts one of them) when divorced from their original text.

But, if "Der Freischütz" gained here a limited success, disappointing to connoisseurs, how much

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more vexatious was the fate of an Italian opera, produced during the same Italian season; one of which I cannot think without the quickest possible sensations of pleasure.—This is the "Moise" of Signor Rossini:—yet another cruelly mortifying proof that some of the finest music which its writer poured forth, is buried, beyond power of man and woman to raise it, beneath the weight of a wrong story.—Nor is this heaviness referable to the subject being Biblical, and as such rejected by English decorum. Even if we could consent to such an offence as seeing the persons of Holy Writ presented on the stage, the legend, as a legend, is badly arranged.—The Plagues and the Portents which interpose for the rescue and defence of an injured people, and for the destruction of tyrannical crime, poorly compensate for the absence of anything like interest in the characters.—There is some colour in the grand recitatives given to the Prophet—but this is all. The lover and the tyrant have small difference between them. The women are thoroughly insipid.—There remain, then, as engines of stage excitement, the supernatural night—the storm with the destruction of the Idol, and the final flight of the captives, with the familiar chorus (half-an-hour's work, as the tale goes), which turned the scale in the fortunes of the opera when it was produced in Italy.—Yet, the composer

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seems to have been aware that it contained some of his most glorious music, by the unusual care which he bestowed on enriching and re-casting it, when it was presented on the Parisian stage.—The new introduction and the new *finale* to the third act—"Moise," in brief, (as a French whole) was unknown to our public till 1850.

Of the magnificence of the new matter added to the old work, what can be said that is too high in praise? There is no contrast in music—no, not even in Handel's stupendous "Israel"—stronger than that between the slow, restless, moaning Darkness-Chorus, (a long *andante maestoso*, unlike any other movement existing in Signor Rossini's operas), and the *stretto* following the delicious round, "*Mi manca la voce*," in which a form of *crescendo*, dear to the master, and more than once abused by him, is worked out, with vivacity and climax, in their happiest forms of expression. It is idle to object that the receipt is one well known—that the means are not such as would be employed by a countryman of Bach or Beethoven. The effect produced is resistless, owing to the exceeding felicity of the phrases (in particular, the *coda*), and the amazing animation of the orchestra. The singers sung it in London as if fire, not blood, was coursing through their veins. A storm of delight burst from every corner of the full theatre. I remember no moment of greater musical excitement.

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This, too, was in no small part aided by the force and fervour of the then new tenor, Signor Tamberlik, who, from his first half hour on the London stage, possessed himself of "the town," as the only alternative to Signor Mario which our audiences were willing to accredit. The secret of our sympathy for this artist—happily, as I write, able and vigorous—may be analysed by readers of the hour. One may tell those of the future, that the voice, howsoever effective, and in its upper notes capable of great power, can hardly be called a charming one—though warm with the South—neither regulated by an unimpeachable method. I conceive that its owner may have begun to sing ere it was thoroughly settled — may have never thoroughly followed up those exercises of vocalization on which alone there is a real dependance to be placed; relying rather on natural fervour and readiness, than on studies such as made Rubini and M. Duprez respectively so complete.—There have been many moments when Signor Tamberlik has reminded me of both these great artists; but, throughout every entire part committed to him, there has been no escaping from a sense of irregularity—or rather call it, want of that last finish which gives an artist his place among first-class artists. Before he came to England, the voice of Signor Tamberlik had contracted that habit of vibration

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which, always, more or less, gives an impression of fatigue and premature decay,—though, in reality, it is merely an ill fashion—a relic of Paganini's treatment of his strings—a peculiarity wondrously turned to account by Rubini when his sustaining power began to desert him, and absolutely, in many of his best performances, producing an effect of emotion not attainable by other means.—Then, however quick, available, and firm as a musician —endowed, it is said, with a capital memory (in all this differing from his brother tenor)—the last, nicest sense of measurement of time, is not among Signor Tamberlik's secrets. Without this there is no perfect satisfaction.—Nevertheless, surprisingly rare is the gift, even among real, sound musicians. I think of Hummel's *ritardando* passages on the pianoforte, at the distance of long, long years—and of the *tempo rubato* of Madame Pasta — of the accent of Madame Persiani—of the support given to every movement in which he was engaged by Lablache—and of Rubini's sensibility, which he could exchange for any amount of animation (in singing) both in musical rhythm and reason—and of the incomparable declamation of M. Duprez,— and thus, cannot help ranging my admirations accordingly.

Still, there was no hearing Signor Tamberlik during a single act of an opera, without being

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aware that he was a man who could sway his public. Then, it was charming, and not common, to listen to Italian words delivered with so pure and true an accent. The English have become so polyglott of late, that the beauty of language bids fair to become effaced, and the value of vowels and consonants to vocal music runs some danger of being forgotten.—The saying of Signor Tamberlik's recitative has often reconciled me to some disappointment in his manner of singing it.

Lastly, a leading phrase—the culminating passage in that amazing *stretto*—enabled Signor Tamberlik to display all his energy and sympathetic warmth within a short compass. The two told, with the might of a whirlwind. The house, as Kean said, "rose at him."—As a further contribution to this "Moise," Signor Tamberlik could bring a profile as remarkable as one on a Roman coin, which gave no ordinary dignity to the "feeble lover" of the antique story.—And, seeing that personal appearance has something to do with the reception of every drama, it is to be recollected, that in this very revival of "Il nuovo Mosé," the aspect of Signor Tamburini, one of the handsomest men ever seen on the stage, (but, lucklessly, dressed for the occasion no doubt from some authentic monument), with bare arms and bracelets, a span-

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gled petticoat and boddice, and false hair plaited at the sides of his face, had something to do with the cool reception of the work.—Those, even, who loved the music as much as I do could not forbear a laugh.—The figure, supposing it Egyptian of the period, was too absurd to be tolerated.

M. Meyerbeer's "Robert" was once more attempted this year, with the new tenor for the hero—with Signor Mario for the *Raimbaud*, and Madame Grisi (the most resolute of Opera-Queens to retain her throne by trying at everything which every singer had done) was the *Alice*. A more complete mistake was never made. The opera has never been liked here, in despite of the fashion of foreign currency.—But the greatest mistake was the *Bertram* of Herr Formes, who this year (as has been told) was for the first time transferred to the Italian stage,—a *Bertram* who floundered about, like an ill-advised bat, so as to hamper every creature concerned with him by his acting, without in the slightest degree redeeming the over-weening predominance by any musical correctness or beauty. —It was a hard and real disappointment—the first of a long list.

Another costly and striking production was that of "La Juive," M. Halévy's best serious opera, selected in mutual deference to such interest as its composer's visit to England excited. The fate of

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"La Juive" throughout Europe is worth a word or two. It can be nowhere said to have succeeded. There is not one single air from it which has become popular. Yet the music is not altogether unworthy of the story—the most powerful opera-book in the modern list; one, though, it has been said, which, with his characteristic disdain, Signor Rossini rejected, in favour of M. Jouy's insipid "Guillaume Tell."—The drama, too, lends itself to that show of spectacle which is almost essential to works on so large a scale. Then, there is novelty in the disposition of the characters—introduced, it has been said, at the instance of Nourrit (a real inventor), who was weary of love-parts. *Eleazar* offers as fine scope for the tenor who is disposed to act as, in its different style, does *Otello*. There must be life in any creation that can keep the stage for a quarter of a century; yet it would be difficult to name a tragedy which has lived so frigidly as "La Juive."—In London it had the advantage of Madame Viardot's acting as the heroine, of which I have spoken elsewhere. The music is beyond her legitimate compass, but she sang it sublimely.—Signor Mario's inefficiency and want of effect as *Eleazar*, were made curious by the fact circulated before the curtain that he had anxiously desired to play the part—having, in fact, been the only singer who has gained entrance

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for a bar of M. Halévy's music in England, by his delicious execution of an air from "Guido and Ginevra." But the cast in its weakness or strength mattered little, I suspect. I fancy that the composer has certain qualities which will always render our audiences impenetrable to his merits. There is a certain hard cleverness, which is particularly distasteful to us,—a measure in full of that spirit which, presented in a smaller quantity, makes us indifferent to Spontini and virtually underrate Cherubini. For precisely this reason it may be, that M. Halévy's music loses more when executed out of Paris, than any other music so really sterling.—It is the best French ware of the second class.

I have often speculated on the interval that may yet elapse before we really possess the Catholic spirit in art, of which we conceive ourselves possessed; how long it may be, ere we recognize that curiously self-consistent nationality of style, which runs through every expression of the imagination in France, and which animates works of every school, with a distinction as marked as that of Italian beauty or German idealism.—When that good time of possession shall come, we shall have three pleasures, instead of two, in foreign Opera-music; and among the most abiding of these may be our pleasure in the Opera of France.

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THE YEAR 1851.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"Le Tre Nozze."*—*Alary.* "Gustave,"* "Massaniello," "L'Enfant Prodigue,"* "La Corbeille d'Oranges."* —*Auber.* "Les Quatre Fils Aymon."* —*Balfe.* "La Sonnambula," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Fidelio."—*Beethoven.* "Lucia," "Lucrezia," "Linda."—*Donizetti.* "Le Nozze." —*Mozart.* "La Cenerentola."—*Rossini.* "Florinda."* *Thalberg.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Duprez.* Fiorentini. Ugalde.* Feller.* Alaimo.* Sontag-Rossi. Alboni. Nau.* Barbieri-Nini.* Bertrand. Giuliani. Cruvelli.—MM. Lorenzo. Bilanchè.* Romagnoli.* Poultier.* Calzolari. Lablache. F. Lablache. Coletti. Pardini.* Massol. Ferranti.* Sims Reeves. Scapini.* Gardoni.

BALLET.

"L'Isle des Amours."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Ferraris. Carlotta Grisi. Monti *(Pantomimist).*

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THE YEAR 1851.

How little of Italy there was in Her Majesty's Theatre during the Great Exhibition year 1851, the foregoing list curiously shows. There was no stint of enterprise;—however much miscalculation. —Generally speaking, the music was more accurately prepared than it had been for some seasons past.

The attempt to enrich the Italian repertory by M. Auber's grand operas has only succeeded in the case of "La Muette." Strictly speaking, that bright Neapolitan story hardly comes within the designation, so few of the great musical pieces are developed. There is a much closer attempt at the style in "Gustave" and "L'Enfant Prodigue," and therefore they are less successful,—the composer always suffering when serious music on a grand scale is to be attempted. A great building

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of alabaster would have a poor appearance, in no-wise suggesting the preciousness of the material. Yet, "Gustave" is full of delicious music finely wrought, beginning with the first notes of the overture, which has a fascination approaching those which open Signor Rossini's opera-preludes. I was never fully aware of the value of this music till I was, in the year 1861, hearing the assault made by Signor Verdi on the same story. It seems strange to those who know a certain affectation to be one characteristic of French Opera composers, that the Italian should be the less natural of the two,—but such is the case.

The version of "L'Enfant Prodigue" pleased less, and deservedly so, in spite of the admirable singing of Madame Sontag, who did wonders with the weak music of her part.—Not only did the Biblical origin of the story weigh against it in England, but M. Scribe's mistake in reproducing the great situation of parent and child—already set forth far more forcibly in "Le Prophète"—could not fail to be felt. "La Corbeille d'Oranges" was inferior to both. This is a thoroughly paltry opera — written expressly for one who was no actress:—on a story which may be said to have reminded the spectators, not of the ripe—but of the squeezed orange. To this tale music was fitted, under the idea of producing a part calculated to

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exhibit the remarkable vocal powers of Madame Alboni, which should not make any demand on her acting. A poorer work was never thrown off by the pen of a clever man.

"Florinda" had greater peculiarity as an entire novelty: and, moreover, as an essay at opera-composition made by a splendid and popular instrumentalist. That the habit of thinking and writing for the pianoforte is not favourable to such enterprises, has been proved often and again.—Steibelt, whose Sonatas and Concertos contain tunes enough to stock the brains of fifty of the men of these our degenerate days, could not manage to throw life into his "Romeo and Juliet."—Hummel's "Matilda von Guise" is still less known.—As a melodist, M. Thalberg is not to be compared with either of his predecessors; though a grandeur and breadth in some of his combinations might be thought to foreshow vigour in dramatic effect,—and of this there were passing traces in this drama.—I recollect one agitated concerted piece, where the device, so common in comic Opera, of expressing confusion by setting a profusion of words each to its note, was used to good effect in a scene of tragic combination; but all the rest has left on me an impression of extreme dryness, and laudably careful writing—nothing more. The story—one of the pieces by M. Scribe, which had long hung on hand—was one of

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small interest. Everyone, however, concerned in the matter fought their best for its success — in particular, Lablache, who was doing his utmost for his son-in-law.

That marvellous and versatile actor—then, too, not very far from the close of his career—did still more in behalf of another opera. He absolutely danced to Madame Sontag's *polka*-song in "Le Tre Nozze" of Signor Alary.—This opera, again, (though never was light comedy more wanted by way of repose and variety), failed to please.—The music was slight and faded, containing few happy phrases. The *polka*-song, however, lingers in our concert-rooms —the fashion of singing dance-music, when a show-piece is wanted, having of late years superseded the yet more foolish habit of singing instrumental airs with variations, introduced by Catalani.

A better fate ought to have attended "Les Quatre Fils Aymon,"—to my thinking Mr. Balfe's best opera:—on a quaint and lively story, and with a nice combination (I think till then untried) of a group of four ladies, manœuvred with and against a group of four gentlemen.—The lot of this work has been as capricious as that of Donizetti's "Fille du Regiment," (one of *his* best operas). Both were written for the *Opera Comique* of Paris—where neither was successful; both have obtained a wide popularity elsewhere.—During some years,

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there was hardly a German Opera-house where "The Sons of Aymon" was not awkwardly performed and heartily received,—an opera of delicious freshness and deep merit, if it be compared with the silly "Stradella" of M. von Flotow, which may be said to have superseded it;—and which still keeps the German stage.—Here, an attempt to set it in English, during the operatic management of Mr. Maddox, at the Princess's Theatre, can be hardly said to have made it known.—It was a disadvantage that, when this opera was given in its Italian dress, the heroine was not represented, as originally intended, by Madame Sontag, who had come to coldness and correspondence with her manager,—but by Mademoiselle Cruvelli, whose eccentricities were more apparent in comic than in serious Opera. In the latter, they were lauded up to the skies by her admirers as so many new readings of the passions.—But, for all that, the part-song of the four young Knights, graceful and *gaillard* in no common degree—and the garden-*finale* to the second act on the darkened stage, built on a melody graceful and mysterious,—as a thread of moonshine creeping through some wood-opening—are not to be forgotten. The opera, it is true, is slight; and the instrumentation more slighted than that of later operas by Mr. Balfe; but it occurs to me now as one which would well

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repay the labour of re-touching, because built on a happy dramatic thought, and thus containing some elegant and arresting musical ideas.

Only two of the ladies,—a sixth part of those who appeared in 1851,—were Italians. The training, however, of Mademoiselle Duprez under her accomplished father, entirely justified her appearing in Italian Opera.—It was a pleasure to hear one so young as herself so honestly prepared for her profession.—There was no common promise in her appearance, since it was then to be hoped that time would bring power to her extensive *soprano* voice, at that time, doubtless, too slender for a large theatre and a grand opera. There was already little to be added in musical taste and acquirement. She sang as one having a style.—That Time hardly fulfilled the hope, is as well known as that she is one of the very few thoroughly-finished singers competent to execute anything that can be written for the voice, now on the stage. Never was *prima donna* called on for a larger amount of resources, than the lady who had to "create" the part of *Catherine*, in M. Meyerbeer's "L'Etoile." The part is one of extreme difficulty and fatigue, which sets in early—the heroine leaving the stage for scarce a moment during the first act, and yet at the close of the opera having to cope alone with two flutes, in that arduous piece of display expressly calculated to

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show off Mademoiselle Jenny Lind's then lustrous upper-notes.—The valiant manner in which this was sustained from beginning to end by one so slenderly endowed with power, and during a long and uninterrupted run of months, cannot be forgotten — though its price (as might have been seen) was injury and enfeeblement of the voice, possibly never to be repaired.

The second French lady named, who at that time had a high repute in Paris — Madame Ugalde—was not fortunate in her attempt to transform herself into an Italian artist. With all her vocal cleverness and audacity, her musical accent, and a dash of true dramatic instinct here and there, she was always an unattractive singer. A want of refinement as distinct from accuracy or finish ran through all her performances.—She was too conscious, too emphatic, and too audacious. Then, her voice, though skilled in every possible exercise:—and not incapable of breadth in the *cantabile* style, when it was needed,—had been trained in the French school, and was, in its best days, not agreeable, because of a certain harpsichord tone—something of the quill and something of the wire—which ran through its compass.—She came here with great ambitions, it was said:—having desired to make her first appearance on our Italian stage as *Semiramide*, with not one solitary requisite for

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the part, save command over any given number of notes in a *roulade*.—Her disappointment must have been great; for, in "L'Enfant Prodigue"—where, besides playing the *Dalilah* who seduces the son from his duty, she sang a little ballad as a camel-boy, more pungently than artlessly—she was entirely eclipsed by Madame Sontag, to whom was allotted the less marked character and music, and from whom, moreover, all disposition to support and to favour her behind the curtain had passed away.

The third—a French-American singer, Mademoiselle Nau, had held for many years a useful and respectable position at the *Grand Opera* of Paris,—M. Auber having written the part of the Fairy in his "Lac des Fées" for her. A more coldly correct singer, with a very small voice, is seldom to be heard.—I have found this lifelessness so frequent among American singers—who, during late years, have been numerous, and some of them accomplished—as to be involuntarily tempted to speculate on this chill as a characteristic. If there be reason in this, the phenomenon is odd, as occurring among a people of many peoples, so full of life, curiosity, and caprice — one to be matched against the languors in music of the mercurial Irish, who, as a race of singers, have a provoking habit of dragging their time. — There is no ac-

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counting for these physical peculiarities; but no one that has ever looked closely at imaginative art can fail to recognize their existence and repetition.

Of the two new Southern ladies —Mademoiselle Alaimo being a native of Sicily — only one is worth remembrance. — In her youth, Madame Barbieri-Nini must have possessed one of the most splendid organs ever born into an Italian throat —a *soprano* voice, sonorous, even ample, and still not heavy, with a geniality of tone rare in German voices of the same quality, — such as those of Madame Stöckl-Heinefetter and Mademoiselle Tietjens.—But Nature had done no more for her. Unsightly is a gentle adjective as applied in her case.—There is an expressive ugliness which may be turned to a certain account on the stage—an unmarked meanness of feature which Genius can light up and animate; but Madame Barbieri-Nini's uncomeliness was at once large and mean —a thing not to be escaped from—and unvarying.—It was perilous to produce such a *Lucrezia Borgia* as hers, when Madame Grisi was in London,—even though Madame Barbieri-Nini—who had been trained, it was said, in this part by the original *Lucrezia*, Mademoiselle Ungher—did credit to her tutorage by her reading, and was throughout careful—in a point or two more—being grand.—

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She sang the florid *largo* in the last scene superbly:—with that mixture of breadth of phrasing, pompous execution, and measurement of time, which belongs to the best school of vocal Italian art—now all but extinct—and she made a real impression on her audience, in spite of her rare physical defects.—But the last were too strong for her.—She arrived too late to habituate her audience to them; and, I have been told by those competent to speak, familiar with her other performances in Italy, was comparatively inferior, as to singing and as to acting, in every opera excepting this, "Lucrezia."

On the whole, the most successful performance of the Great Exhibition year was that of "Fidelio," in which Mademoiselle Cruvelli was ably supported by Mr. Sims Reeves.—In this music, our admirable English tenor was as ripe as the lady was crude.—He drew out from the vocal music and finished all in it that is tuneable and lovely, without any sacrifice of declamation or dramatic force—without being overborne by the orchestra—without constraining the latter to any complaisance for the singers.—But, even then, Mr. Sims Reeves was far beneath the point which he has since reached, by care and thought, and real artistic feeling.—As to "Fidelio," howsoever symphonically superb it be, the opera is one in which there is no judging of a vocalist's qualities; and, accord-

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ingly, Mademoiselle Cruvelli's powerful and extensive voice suited the music: and its composer had chained his executants too fast for her to attempt those vagaries which, with success, and by the encouragement of injudicious admirers, became at a later period so prominent in her performances.—Up to this time, there had been some improvement in the arrangement and command of the admirable materials given to the lady by Nature; but henceforward the misuse of them increased so steadily, and with it her exactions and caprices as an artist, that it was a case of relief — not for regret—when she left the stage.

The new gentlemen (two of these, also, French) were, one and all, inferior.

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THE YEAR 1851.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"Massaniello."—*Auber.* "Fidelio."—*Beethoven.* "Lucrezia Borgia," "La Favorita," "L'Elisir."—*Donizetti.* "Saffo."*—*Gounod.* "Robert," "Le Prophète," "Les Huguenots."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni," "Il Flauto Magico."—*Mozart.* "Semiramide," "La Donna del Lago."—*Rossini.* "Il Franco Arciero."—*Weber.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Angri. Castellan. Bertrandi.* Viardot. Zerr.* L. Pyne.*—MM. Salvatori.* Tamberlik. Formes. Stigelli.* Bianchi. Tagliafico. Ronconi. Mario. Ciaffei.* Tamburini.

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THE YEAR 1851.

It may be here said, that the virtual abandonment of the *ballet* at Covent Garden, except as an accessory to grand Opera, or merely as filling half an hour in an evening's performance, makes further record of dances and *divertissements* unnecessary.—Interest in dancing seems for the present to have died out in London.—In fact, wherever a strong and wholesome taste for dramatic music increases;—the other entertainment must hold a secondary place,—unless some new Genius should appear, like Mdlle. Taglioni, to delight us with her modest and poetical grace,—or like Mdlle. Fanny Elssler, by her union of brilliant execution and admirable pantomime.

The foregoing list of operas will show an increase of the tendency towards works of the German school. In its second season, however, the

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Italianized version of "Der Freischütz" proved unattractive, in spite of the appearance of Signor Tamberlik in the tenor part.—Nor could the same artist's excellent singing as *Florestan* overcome the apathy of the public to the version of "Fidelio," performed in Covent Garden for the first time.—The audience *encored* one of the magnificent four "Leonora" overtures prefixed to the second act; but the performance, as a whole, was, somehow, not right—not German;—careful, but languid.—Madame Castellan did her utmost to be womanly; but she was neither sufficiently intense nor touching as *Leonora*, and the music tore her voice—an organ which had never been altogether regulated.—The opera, I have become more and more convinced on every return to it, is one only to be enjoyed under certain conditions and certain limitations;—in spite of the affecting nature of its story, in spite of the beauties of idea and enrichment which it contains,—the affecting Prisoners' chorus — the thrilling grave-digging scene in the vault — and the luxury of instrumental beauty lavished over the work, so as only Beethoven could lavish it.—The strain on all the singers, ascribable to the master's indifference to vocal convenience or beauty; the heaviness of certain portions—as, for instance, the close of the first *finale* (one of Beethoven's least happy inspirations) bear with an oppressive effect on both artists

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and audiences, except they be relieved and brightened by nationality of humour in those who execute.

A most careful effort was made to perform "Il Flauto Magico" in the most perfect manner. The wholesale admirers of particular schools and masters refuse to admit the extreme wearisomeness of this elaborate puzzle,* decked as it is with admirable music, when the opera is presented on the stage;—and regard all admission of the same as frivolous blasphemy.—It would be wearisome to recapitulate the reasons, why neither that which is serious, nor that which is comic, nor that which is sentimental, nor that which is fantastic, tell as they ought, when, setting forth a story which no one can assert to be either mystical, or allegorical, or a simple imitation of the Carlo Gozzi's faëry extravaganzas—awkwardly executed. In proportion as the nature of Drama in music is understood, will the regret deepen, that one so consummate in science, so shrewd in discernment, and so boundless in musical idea as Mozart, should so carelessly, to please the worthless manager of a popular theatre (for such was Shikaneder), have thrown away the richest veils and garlands and jewels of his art, in decorating a thing not so much disproportioned as having no ascertainable form. In themselves, what can be fresher than the melodies?

* "Modern German Music," vol. ii., p. 159.

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—more stately than the solemn choruses?—more sprightly than the music given to the lighter characters?—We have known them so long, and have loved them so well, as concert and home music, that by many it will be till the end of Time thought a flat heresy to say that their place, heard in a detached form, is in the concert-room—but not as parts of a drama, which has no clear meaning on the stage.

The music was most carefully rendered by Madame Grisi, Signor Mario — and excellently by Herr Formes, who was heard and seen to his best advantage as *Sarastro*.—Every conceivable quaintness and unpremeditated freak were thrown into the part of *Papageno* by Signor Ronconi; and the smaller part of *Papagena* was taken with zeal and relish by Madame Viardot.—Then, for *Queen of Night*, an agile and clever singer, possessor of the acute notes requisite for the part,—and, it was to be presumed, the true Vienna tradition,—had been imported from Austria in Mademoiselle Anna Zerr.

This was a very curious artist, belonging to a class larger than people take pains to recollect, —the highest *soprani* of the old school of vocal writing, from whom any amount of volubility and execution *above the stave* was to be demanded.—It may be doubted, whether there have ever existed so

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many singers of the kind* as during the past quarter of a century.—How its existence is to be reconciled with the cry of complaint against the raised diapason of modern times, as rendering the old music impossible to be sung, baffles comprehension. The feat, when it is done, is worth little —and it may be counterfeited by adroit trickery. By this, is believed, *La Bastardella*, (Lucrezia Agujari, who sang in London at Burney's concerts in the Pantheon, for £100 a night,) who was the wonder-singer of Mozart's time, produced those topmost notes—up to CC *alt.*—which so amazed the composer; and may have inspired him with his fancy of writing for such marvellous folk,—as is obvious in his "Die Eutführung," and the opera now spoken of.—If the feat, however, be not elegantly mastered, the effect is more than worthless—one to recall the pain of a surgical operation, howsoever it may strike the vulgar with surprise. Mademoiselle Zerr, like many of her German sisters, was more strenuous than easy. Her voice

* At present, Madame Goldschmidt, Madame de la Grange, Miss Louisa Pyne, Madame Cabel, Madame Miolan-Carvalho, Madame Van den Heuvel Duprez, Mademoiselle Patti, and many others—all command the *altissimo* register,—and this, too, at a time when a dramatic force and declamation are expected in combination with execution, never thought of by most of the bird-like warblers of the old school. (1862).

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was shrill and harsh. She gave the slow movements of her grand airs in the true, broad, sensitive style which Mozart's *cantabiles* demand; but, in her *bravuras*, the hearer was irresistibly reminded of a pea-hen masquerading as a lark.—When all had been done, and done correctly, and the *Astrafiammante* looked triumphantly round for the great applause, which came plentifully from the lovers of amazement, one took breath, thankful that the operation was over!—On one evening she was replaced, at an hour's warning, and with as much gain as loss to the performance, by Miss Louisa Pyne, who had never till then attempted Italian Opera:—another illustration of the mastery with which our best English artists can assume various occupations in foreign music; in none, possibly, complete—but as a body more steady, meritorious, and prepared, than the singers of Italy, Germany, or France, so-called on, could prove themselves.—This may be because we have, till now, no great stage-style, nor stage-music, of our own; and because our vocalists must have, therefore, a reference to, and a dependance on, the music of foreign countries; and because, as a company, they are more skilled musicians than those of other lands.

The revival of "Il Flauto," however interesting by reason of its completeness, and precious as affording the student an opportunity of considering

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a work of art so famous in its true light, could not often be repeated.

Signor Salvatori, who had long enjoyed a great reputation as a dramatic bass singer in Italy, failed utterly in London, from his arriving after his voice had been destroyed.

The latest attempt of any mark at bringing forward a new composer at either of the Opera-houses, was the production of M. Gounod's "Sapho." This took place too late in the season of 1851 for the opera to have had any chance of establishing itself;—supposing that other adverse circumstances had not opposed themselves to the immediate reception of the new writer in this country.

On one alone of these is it worth while to return for a moment:—the pertinacious resistance of a portion of the English public (and this by no means its least refined and cultivated section) to everything that is new. Through this had Beethoven to fight, and Signor Rossini;—and, later, M. Meyerbeer. Even after Mendelssohn had fascinated England by his amazing first appearances in "The Midsummer Nights' Dream" overture, and his pianoforte *Concert Stück*, there was a lull in curiosity and interest of some half a dozen years' duration respecting him.—It would be vastly inconvenient, after all, to a multitude of easy-going

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connoisseurs, if the new man were to turn out a new Genius!—It is hard to regard bigotry like this without impatience; and the worst consequence of it is, that adventurous spirits who have more enthusiasm than judgment, and who are irked by hearing certain names told over and over and over again in a sort of cuckoo-hymn, which it costs small trouble to sing—are driven into licence for liberty, and in their irritation lose all power of discriminating that which is bad from that which seems good. The singular and noticeable outbreak in Germany,* which, for a while, bade fair to destroy there all love of what is real and beautiful in art—the greatness thrust on Herr Wagner—could never have happened, were there not abroad and talking in the world—not in the Opera-world alone—too many persons, such as those who, in answer to any curiosity expressed about "Sapho," would reply, "But why don't they give us 'Don Juan'?"

To a few hearers—since then grown into a European public—neither the warmest welcome, nor the most bleak indifference, could alter the conviction, that among the composers who have appeared during the past twenty-five years, M. Gounod was the most promising one,—as showing the greatest combination of sterling science, beauty of idea, fresh-

* "Modern German Music," vol. i., last chapter.

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ness of fancy, and individuality of style.—Before a note of "Sapho" was written, certain sacred Roman Catholic compositions, and some exquisite settings of French verse, had made it clear to some of the acutest judges and most profound musicians living, that in him, at last, something new and true had come,—may I not say, the most poetical of French musicians that has till now written?—By some of these the composer's name was mentioned to me; and the same curiosity and hope which urged me to undertake a day-and-night journey to Weimar, in the expectation of great things from Herr Wagner (also on the instigation of those whom I trusted), took me to Paris, to hear for myself.*

I conceive "Sapho" to be the best *first* opera ever written by a composer—Beethoven's "Fidelio" (his first and last) excepted. The story was not well fancied; and its writer — M. Emile Augier, whose delicious little drama, "La Cigüe," had already shown how irony could be intro-

* The great admiration felt by me from the first for one who combines, in his art, many rare and charming qualities, was (not unnaturally) ascribed to private influences and sympathies.—Thus, as a vindication of private judgment, I may put in evidence that, under precisely the same circumstances did I arrive at a knowledge of the new German music, on every account to be repudiated (as I think)—and of the new French compositions, so largely (as I think) to be accredited.

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duced into antique art—inwrought into this old tale a thread not so much of comedy as of political sarcasm,—a humour unpresentable in Music.* Possibly, too, the old wells are dried up. Though the present generation may be tormented by weak reproductions of Greek sculpture—by new Venuses painted, or unpainted, and similar affectations—till the end of its term,—it may prove that Greek Opera was exhausted by Gluck.—Sacchini's "Œdipe" has vanished. The transcendant "Medea" of Cherubini is inaccessible.—There is a time for everything.—A new *Parthenon* is almost as improbable to be built as a new Bamberg Cathedral.

Yet, after every qualification has been made,—there will be found in the "Sapho" of M. Gounod enough of what is new and true to stamp its composer:—a certain placid grandeur of line; a richness of colour—not, perhaps, sufficiently various;

* It is curious to note that, whereas "Le Prophète," or the tragedy of a Pretender exalted into absolute power, had been allowed to pass without question in the year 1849—in the year 1852 some hits against an ill-managed Republic were expunged from the book of "Sapho" by the Censorship—a power the misgivings and givings of which are indeed elastic.—When our allies were in the midst of our joint Crimean quarrel with Russia, representations were made to the absolute authorities that it might be impolitic, for the moment, to sanction the production of M. Meyerbeer's "L'Etoile du Nord" at the *Opera Comique*.—These, however, were unheeded.

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an elegance and tenderness of melody, which belong to no preceding model.—The harmonies, it is true, are in the taste of the time, which inclines to what is vague; but to this charge those of Mendelssohn are liable, and still more those of Chopin.—In his predilection for writing on a ground bass, M. Gounod does not follow the modern fashion.—I question if the device has been often in the theatre more happily employed than in *Sappho's* song and chorus in the second act, and than in the *Shepherd's* lay on the rock in the final scene, which contrasts, in its exquisite wildness, with the grand and desolate lyric of the heroine, ere she buries her despair in the waves. The entire close of the opera may be compared, in its simplicity, its power to move, with Signor Rossini's masterpiece of expression, the third act of "Otello."—Exquisitely graceful, too, are some of the lighter portions of the work*—such as the

* The grace of these has been since more gayly and variously exemplified in certain portions of M. Gounod's "Medicin malgrè lui;" more signally still in his *ballet* music.—All that belongs to "La Nonne Sanglante" is capital,—only exceeded by that of M. Meyerbeer. There is one Hungarian dance, in particular, (with a ground bass), which is of the very highest quality, for character, spirit, and elegance. There are few, if any, stage-waltzes, with a chorus so fresh, so simple, and so resistless, as that in M. Gounod's "Faust."

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chorus of girls who greet the heroine when she arrives to compete for the prize of song,—and the duett in which *Sappho's* rival, *Glycera*, cajoles the old voluptuary.—These passed unappreciated in London, and even in Paris; because here Madame Castellan, there Mademoiselle Poinsot, were rather heavy, rather out of tune, and pointless.—Many, many more happy passages and pertinent thoughts could be specified, to which the world has begun to do justice. A return to this opera, in spite of the drawbacks of subject and story, is as possible as was the return of the German public to "Fidelio"—the entire failure of which on its production so blanked the expectations of Beethoven's friends and self.

Though "Sapho" was well received by the audience, in spite of our habitual timidity in approval of the work of one hitherto unknown, the wrath and ridicule outpoured by most of the censors of the press, were too vehement and curious not to be put on record. The event has not justified the sagacity of those who jeered at and assailed the music, and who declared that any expectation invested in its writer was only so much sheer hallucination. There is dispraise of a quality which defeats its own object.—The fact has to be swallowed and digested, that already the composer of "Sapho," the choruses to "Ulysse,"

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"Le Médecin Malgre lui," "Faust," "Philemon et Baucis," a superb Cecilian Mass, two excellent symphonies, and half a hundred songs and romances, which may be ranged not far from Schubert's, and above any others existing in France—is now one of the very few individual men left to whom musical Europe is looking for its pleasure.

And here—since digression is a part of recollection—it may be allowed me to dwell on this aforesaid "Faust," by M. Gounod—as I did a score of years since on the operas of M. Meyerbeer—now so indispensable; then visited with such bitter contempt by our critics, who would neither give ear to the music, nor endure the praise of it by any writer. Labour, however, is somehow thriftlessly bestowed by the persons who would instruct some of us that black is yellow.—There are many with whom first and last impressions are one.—It is possible to force one's self into an admission of cleverness;—but to try to enjoy that which is not attractive, is a stupid exercise, to say the least of it;—one hopelessly undertaken by those who have real opinions, principles, and fancies of their own.

It may be doubted (let it be said at the outset) whether "Faust" is a better subject for music than "Hamlet"—whether Marlow's and Goethe's hero is not a character of a quality so subtle and complex,

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so fine in its lights, so flickering in its shadows, as to defy the power of sound to express it, if not of stage presentation to exhibit it.—Yet it has tempted "all and sundry"—Prince Radzivill took Goethe's drama in hand.—Spohr, who had a strange desire for being—that which he could not be—fantastic and supernatural (and who showed a choice in his opera-books as curiously courageous as his music was timidly orderly)—

"took up the wondrous tale."

not the tale, however, as told by Goethe; but a version of the story at once dull and fierce—including coarse witch-work, and adventure meant to be lively, but motionless as regards interest.—More lately, Schumann, Dr. Liszt, M. Berlioz, have treated the story—and the last-named composer with added spices and condiments which, indeed, are curious:—here, a Hungarian march; there, a diabolical outcry of gibberish, made for the occasion—as one might make an Unknown Tongue.

This latest setting of "Faust," by M. Gounod—if only as being the clearest musical one—is well worth a respectful study.—Certain of the German purists—forgetting how even their noble Schiller, when translating Shakespeare for the stage, could interpolate scenes not in our poet's text—have professed themselves as being cruelly outraged because

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the French composer has stuck so closely to Goethe's text—has used so many of Goethe's words.—To us English, who take the last act of "Otello," including the "Willow Song" so tranquilly—nay, rather say, with such enthusiastic pleasure—this seems only so much churlish pedantry.

In the Introduction, the vague, restless gloom of the old philosopher, weary of the life whose *arcanum* he has been unable to find—the sounds of rural and young people passing without—the resolution to end one mystery of existence by attempting another yet untried, the mystery beyond the grave—are excellently coloured; and characterized in a manner which is free, graphic, original.—Less so — and this may be noted throughout the work—is the tone of *Mephistopheles*; perhaps because that worthy is as little susceptible of being wrought out in music as Shakespeare's *Iago*—fine sarcasm finding in our art no colour.—Be this as it may, the Demon is here weak.

Nothing can be imagined more jovial, or more original, than the *Kermesse* music which opens the second act, where the tune passes from group to group.—In particular the verse allotted to the old citizens is admirably quaint and melodious. The combination of all the separate elements, at the close of the movement, is of itself enough to substantiate M. Gounod's skill as a composer:—though

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a certain vagueness and disposition to push harmonic license to its utmost must be allowed for, under protest.—As I have said, I cannot fancy the waltz and chorus which close the act (during which dance *Margaret* crosses the stage to a strain that Mozart might not have disdained to own) exceeded in brightness, novelty, and thorough nature.—No French waltz that I know approaches it in beauty, and in the utter absence of that torment with which our neighbours delight to add piquancy to their dance-music.—Till this time *Margaret* has only been glanced at.—The third and fourth acts bring her out in all the innocence, passion, and woe of her character.—After *Faust's* delicious monologue in the garden come her old ballad of the King of Thule; and her delight at discovering the casket of jewels—so combined as to make an important song of entrance for the heroine.—The *allegretto*, I observe, has excited lively displeasure among certain German critics; who quarrel with her pretty surprise as being too coquettish—the air having, to make its sins more heinous, the enormity of a long trill to bring back the subject.—How the transcendentalists would set to music the wonderment, the artless, harmless vanity of the child who fancies herself alone, I cannot presume to conceive;—though I have every confidence in the power of meagreness of idea to take the form of a pedantic

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weariness, and to impose on the shallow as so much profundity. For my poor part, the liveliness of this *cabaletta* is to me attractive and true to the situation—the closing phrase of it is exquisite in its grace. It may be pointed out, however, as the most *French* number in the opera.—Then comes a quartett, full of happy touches, and charming phrases of melody. M. Gounod, however, has too great a tendency in his concerted music to interrupt the flow of the melody for the sake of a bit-by-bit accuracy of setting his words; hardly trusting enough to the lights and shades which singers of intelligence can throw into their interpretation and hardly remembering enough that a movement must not be judged bar by bar, chord by chord, but by its character and colour as a whole. Emotion does not mean too much expression.—A reader who would emphasize every word (save, perchance, when reading a "Latter-Day pamphlet") would become terribly fatiguing.—The love-duett which follows is more complete in this respect—a real love-duett, if there was ever such a thing written;—one of those inspirations which might have been born among the dews of a summer-twilight, and the scent of flowers, and the musical falling of distant waters.—The brief *adagio* which contains the full confession of the pair has a luxury of tenderness and beauty which are unsurpassable.—After the part-

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ing, the recall of *Faust* to the fatal interview, it must be owned, is somewhat of an anti-climax; weakening the impression as the act closes.

We are now in the act of shame and remorse; throughout which the composer is almost always at the height of his subject.—I wish, though, that he had not felt himself bound to set the spinning song again.—As easy would it have been to treat the "Erl King" anew, after Schubert—or the "Willow Song" in "Otello."—A Lenau may have the temerity to handle "Faust" after a Goethe—but it is the temerity (as his melancholy fate proved) of incipient madness.—In this case, however, the wonder is that the French composer did not fail more utterly.

From this point to the death of *Valentine* in duel with the seducer, there is not a weak bar. The return of the Regiment is one of those seizing pieces of music which are instinct with fire. I shall never forget the riotous enthusiasm which burst out when this magnificent chorus, to which an army of myriads might sweep on its way to victory, electrified the ear at the *Theatre Lyrique*, on the night of the first performance of the opera. I feel it thrill in my pen as I write.—Very wicked is the sarcastic *serenade* sung under *Margaret's* window by *Mephistopheles*—his most wicked music in the opera.—The duel *trio* is in the highest tone

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of challenge: as chivalresque, after its kind, as the admirable *Septuor* in "Les Huguenots."—The death of *Valentine*, and his curse, is painted with a grave and lacerating passion that are of the highest order of expression.—It was hard, after this, to deal with the scene in the Church, with the Tempter at the unwedded Mother's ear, taunting her with her shame, and bidding her to leave all hope behind: while the pealing organ, and the awful monkish hymn, menace her like words of irrevocable doom. Here M. Gounod's church studies have stood him in great stead. The solemnity of the organ-strain, the naked grimness of the chaunts, are both venturesome in their awful depth of gloom: —the cry of *Margaret's* agonised prayer, when the Terror becomes intolerable, could hardly be better poured forth. There are few, if any living men, who could produce music more worthy of the situation. Even when Weber and Spohr were writing operas, Goethe himself said that no one could treat it: save, perhaps, M. Meyerbeer.—How nearly that ingenious master of combination, who loves to pile *Ossa* on *Pelion*, conscious of his power to accumulate and build up, has approached to the sublimities of the church-scene in "Faust," may be seen in his melodramatic "Robert."—M. Berlioz, though notoriously afraid of nothing, has wisely not touched it.—He has the Easter hymn,

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and the student orgy, and the Sylphs—and the ghastly ride, and the Devils (for whom he has invented a pandemoniacal Unknown Tongue)—but he has wisely stopped at the portal of the church; and there left the heart-broken penitent alone.

The fifth act, as at present performed, as replacing the Walpurgis music originally written (which was the weakest part of the entire opera), now opens with a hideous and dismal goblin symphony, transferred judiciously from "La Nonne Sanglante" (a work crushed under the monstrous dullness of the story). —After Weber and Meyerbeer had done their worst—the one in "the Wolf's Glen," the other in the cloisters of Saint Rosalie—it was no easy matter to find new supernatural colours and combinations.—Devilry, like fairyism, in music has only a limited gamut;—but in this wild, wierd symphony, with its wail of wordless voices, fitful as the bitter blast of midnight sweeping cloud-borne across a blasted heath—M. Gounod has added some notes to the scale of effect.—There is something new in its terrors:—a vague, yet not utterly formless horror, such as raises expectation.—Though for contrast's sake, I suppose, was next introduced the transformation which brings us into the midst of the Bacchanal orgies of the old Pagan deities:—and though there is a suave and stately voluptuousness in the chorus, and an animation in the goblet-

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song for *Faust*—this is one of the portions of the opera which moves me the least.—Not so the final scene in the prison: with the despair of the crazed victim; the maddening recognition of her lover; the temptation to fly; and at last the outburst of supplication, and faith, and delicious hope; and the willing farewell to life of who sees Pardon leaning from heaven for the crime which has wrought such bitter misery.—These are here touched with a master's hand. The passion sweeps like a whirlwind to the catastrophe. There is no indecision—no faltering—nothing to hold back a climax the effect of which, when it arrives, is overwhelming—if it be only moderately well rendered.

In one respect "Faust" was admirably presented in Paris;—and, indeed, the opera-stage has rarely seen a poet's imagining more completely wrought out than in the *Margaret* of Madame Miolan-Carvalho.—I had, for some few years, watched the progress of this exquisitely-finished artist with great interest—before she had begun to excite any attention in her own country—finding in her performances a sensibility rarely combined with such measureless execution as hers—and it has been fancied hardly possible to a voice in quality like hers—a high and thin *soprano*, with little volume of tone—but I was not prepared for the delicacy of colouring, the innocence, the tenderness of the earlier scenes—and

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the warmth of passion, and remorse, and repentance which one then so slight in frame (to see the very painter's *Margaret*) could throw into the drama as it went on. Rarely has there been a personation more complete—rarely one more delightful. Those know only one small part of this consummate artist's skill (if even they know her as an incomparable *Cherubino*, and as most brilliant among the brilliant in such a fantastic *extravaganza* as *La Reine Topaze*) that have not seen her in this remarkable "Faust" by M. Gounod.—Wherefore an opera successful throughout the Continent has been till now withheld from our opera-stage—during a period when, to stave off utter famine, we are compelled to have recourse to translations from the French—let the Sybils declare. (1862.)

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THE YEAR 1852.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"Norma," "I Puritani," "La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Maria di Rohan," "Lucia," "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "Casilda."*—*H.R.H. the Duke of Saxe-Cobourg.* "La Prova d'un Opera Seria."—*Gnecco.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "L'Italiana," "Il Barbiére," "Semiramide," "La Cenerentola."—*Rossini.* "Ernani."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Fiorentini. Bertrandi. Cruvelli. Feller. De la Grange.* Favanti. Charton.*—MM. Ferlotti. Calzolari. Gardoni. Lablache. Beletti. De Bassini.*

BALLET.

"Zelie."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Guy Stephan.—Rosati.

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THE YEAR 1852.

THIS year, at last, an Italian Opera season was gone through without a single female Italian singer.—But it was evident that the impending ruin of the theatre could not be averted much longer;—and that shifts and expedients, as reckless as they were fruitless, must needs be resorted to.

There was no novelty in music attempted, save "Casilda," by H.R.H. the Duke of Saxe-Cobourg —creditable as amateur-composition, but no more.

Indeed, though the dramas of Princess Amelia of Saxony, so cordially introduced to our public by Mr. Jameson, may in some manner be said to establish an exception, I doubt the feasibility of amateur stage-composition — amateur scaling of ladders to get into a sharply-fenced citadel—amateur running up the rigging on a stormy night—

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amateur resolution to do one of the hardest, most painful, of artistic tasks;—where the bad chances are as ten to one: where the caprices are infinite, where there are mire and sand to be waded through—where there is experience to be bought, by Time and Labour, and not by Influence or Gold.—What I said, in the case of Signor Mario's singing, of occasional grace and taste in interpretation, naturally fostered by refined habits—of a certain delicacy (to concede) in idea—has nothing to do with those processes of composition, of schooling, and (most important to one who will dare the arena of a theatre) of testing a man's power to move by its effects on folk unbiassed and unprejudiced;—on persons who come to the play to hear and to see;—and who, like the *Miller* in Scott's "Monastery," when his daughter *Mysie* was engaged by the fine euphuism of *Sir Piercie Shafton*, will say, "Brave words—very brave words—very exceedingly pyet words—nevertheless, to speak my mind, a lippy of bran were worth a bushel o' them."—How many amateur singers have I not been asked to hear, commended as "thorough-bred," who, when compared with the poorest professional artist, were, save in such power as belongs to appreciation, feeble, and ill-assured, and timid!

And so it must be.—If a King Louis of France will choose to be a locksmith, he must go through

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another training than that of holiday hammering at the *Tuileries*.—There is no disability in Wealth, Rank—Royalty even—for any imagination, for any art. Only art is a craft, and Rank and Royalty have other duties than to learn artistic craftsmanship: the duties of appreciation and enlightened encouragement—duties which have nothing to do as meeting the greedy notion of every idle idiot (not "inspired") who conceives he could make his fortune by aid of patronage—duties which have nothing to do to the venal courtesy of every court follower, but which, as belonging to everyone of high station, may be thought to suggest—if not to enjoin—that (since actual participation in the field of artistic triumphs is impossible) there remains a greater part still—apart from flatterers, apart from small competitive vanity — the part of enjoyment, of understanding, and, within rational limits, of sympathy;—which last means assistance without favouritism.

These matters may have been too largely overlooked. They are stated here in no spirit of vulgar disrespect (since disrespect is vulgar, whether applied to all sincere effort made by those above or beneath one, so far as the world of ranks and classes goes).—I heard a second opera, "Santa Chiara," by the same composer, at the *Grand Opera* of Paris a year or two since (with a clever singer, Madame Lafon, in the principal part), of

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which I recollect a great stage-effect,—a *catafalque*, out of which the body of a lady, buried alive, was rescued by a lover:—nothing save this.

Such truth as there may be in what I have said, belongs to a newer work still, the "Pierre de Medicis," by Prince Poniatowski, the other day given at Paris—feeble, flaccid, imitative music, if such words had ever any application.

I cannot but recollect what Mrs. Southey, in her "Chapters on Churchyards," advised widows to do over their husband's graves. "Sow annuals," said she.—Opera is not to be grappled with by amateurs, at our stage of the art.—That there is a lovely world of amateur music;—of serenades, and romances, and elegant charming melodies, could be proved from the published melodies of the Prince Belgiojoso, who, in 1836, when I first knew Paris, was resident there,—singing admirably with a *golden* tenor voice, and magnificently handsome presence.—I remember his presenting to Niedermeyer, the composer of "Stradella," Niedermeyer's own romance, "*Venise est encore au bal*," before the opera was produced; and I remember Niedermeyer's reply, "Ah, sir, what a pity that you are not an artist!" —The compliment was real—not that of a sycophant.

Enough—perhaps some will say, too much—of amateurship.—I have already referred, acciden-

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tally, to one of the ladies who was new to the Opera—Madame de la Grange.—She was by many degrees more of an artist than the generality of those who had recently appeared:—the possessor of a high *soprano* voice, more tremulous than pleasing; of neat and boundless execution, especially in the power of taking the most distant intervals; and of some dramatic sensibility.—The other lady, Madame Charton, had already made an agreeable impression when singing in French Comic Opera at the St. James's Theatre, by her pleasing voice and appearance, and by a certain "coziness" of manner which is very agreeable.—But, in the year 1852, she had not sufficiently prepared herself for a change of occupation, which must be found very difficult to those whose practice has been confined to French Comic Opera. The short phrases of melody—the absence of *cantabile*, and the affluence of piquant passages—the conversational weakness of the spoken dialogue, as compared with the simpler declamation or reply of sung recitative—the separate study of vowels in the pronunciation of the two languages—offer so many difficulties to the artist, which nothing short of long study, or a remarkable natural versatility, can overcome.—The former had not then been sufficiently given; but the lady, it is said, has, since her few London performances, ripened into

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an acceptable Italian singer and actress, and succeeded as such.*

The change for the worse in Mademoiselle Cruvelli began to show itself strongly this season. More at ease with her public than formerly;—and by panegyric encouraged to rate herself as equal, if not superior, to the greatest of her predecessors, she began, in fancy, to originate—in reality, to neglect. —Every now and then some wild burst of energy in her singing displayed the glorious compass of her voice—but, also, that its freshness was even then departing; while her acting, though it was animated enough, perpetually missed its mark, owing to her extreme self-occupation.—She was triumphantly

* On returning to notes taken of events as they passed,—I find the following extract from a French paper, describing a benefit taken by Madame Charton at Marseilles, in 1853—I am unable to state in what language.—It is worth preserving, among other curiosities of the kind:—

"Two hundred and ten bouquets were flung from the upper boxes on the entrance of Madame Charton. Forty-nine bouquets of great diameter were launched from all parts of the house during the performance; then a splendid *monumental* bouquet of camellias, made at Genoa, and forwarded to Marseilles in a box two-and-fifty *centimetres* in circumference; lastly, eleven crowns, in gold, in silver, and in artificial flowers.—In the first rank of these crowns must be specified that offered by the *Societé Trotebas* (so called from the name of its conductor), every massive silver leaf of which bore the name of one of the lady's favourite characters."

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heedless of all her companions on the stage. In her great scenes she was always too soon or too late. She preferred to fly into a fury before the word was spoken that should set fire to the train.—She would fall into an attitude just after the moment for the attitude had gone by.—Then she performed strange evolutions with her drapery by way of being statuesque, and exhibited things more strange with her costume when it was not antique, by way of being pictorial.—So well were these propensities of hers known that, later:—when, as Queen of the *Grand Opera* of Paris, she deliberately altered the rhythm of the leading phrase of a grand duett in "Les Huguenots," the world said — "Only Mademoiselle Cruvelli's way;" — and when, a few months later, the choice of some coming opera was in debate, loungers reported, rather admiringly than otherwise, that "this time there was to be a part with bare arms in it, for Mademoiselle Cruvelli!"

Such amateurs as were not yet disabused in regard to the reality of Italian reputations,—or who for themselves admired the new manner of bald and violent singing,—had for some years been speaking of Signor de'Bassini in terms so high as to excite curiosity in regard to his real value.—In 1852 he was a handsome man, with a fine voice: with something of the style which is, happily, not yet here accepted for real style, and in the management

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of his voice with some dramatic energy.—But our public was not worthy of him,—as I have, again and again, heard said of singers many degrees less interesting than himself, in the theatres of Italy;—by *dilettanti* raised nearer the seventh heaven of rapture in proportion to the noise which could be made by Tragedy-Queen—Lover pursued by Jealousy—or Uncle cruel and bold.—He could do little to save our sinking theatre.

Everything, in short, conspired to hasten the decay and downfall of the old Opera-house, which, for many a year past, had possessed such great artists, and had exhibited one new Italian composer in his prime after another.—But there are people whom no adversity will instruct;—and the world was once more invited to wait and believe on the strength of a rumour, and an incident too curious to be forgotten, as a matter of dramatic recollection.

So remarkable had been the attention and ferment stirred by Mdlle. Jenny Lind's indecision and breach of contract, by the paragraphs in the papers, and the proceedings in the courts of law, of which she was the object—that hers was thought a fashion good to be followed by other singers, in no respect so well worth quarrelling for.—At the time spoken of, a tall, handsome young lady, with a finer *mezzo-*

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soprano voice than is general in her country, with real talent for the stage, was creating a great sensation in Berlin by singing in "Le Prophète"—in close imitation of the original *Fides*.—It is always wise to mistrust such close imitations who appear so immediately after their models have shown themselves—though for a while they thrive.—It is particularly unwise when the enthusiasm is Berlin enthusiasm.—Any one who had witnessed the fits of rapture into which one-half of the Prussian capital was thrown by Mdlle. Löwe's imperfect singing, might be excused from entertaining extraordinary expectations of Mdlle. Johanna Wagner.—Before she was heard in London—in the year 1853—I had an opportunity of studying her talent in the Prussian capital, and of finding it in no respect equal to the reputation so loudly trumpeted.—She was one of the many who sing without having learned to sing. Her voice—an originally limited one, robust rather than rich in tone—was already strained and uncertain:—delivered after a bad method, and incapable of moderate flexibility,—as was to be felt when she toiled through Mozart's air, "*Parto*," from "La Clemenza," with its clarinet *obbligato*.—She wore man's attire well and decorously, but she had too much of the elaborate and attitudinizing style of her country to be acceptable as an actress, especially in the Italian drama:—where the passion, if

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it cannot be made to seem spontaneous, becomes intolerable.—Such opinions were shared by the English public when she *did* appear.

In 1851, however, Mademoiselle Wagner arrived in England, as Mademoiselle Lind had done, under engagement to sing at both Opera-houses,—having broken a first contract, because of the superior advantage and security of the second one.—Here, then, was a second of those quarrels in which managers delight, as in drums which summon the world to the show—here were more of conflicting rumour—more of paragraph-making—more of costly appeal to courts of law—more of running to and fro—more of examining witnesses.—Mademoiselle Wagner had only presented herself at a solitary rehearsal of "Le Prophète" at Covent Garden Theatre, when she was laid under prohibition by the judicial authority, and was prevented from appearing in either Opera-house till the quarrel should be settled.—It was during the litigation on this case that a letter from her father was produced, containing the contemptuous phrase, "that one only *could* go to England to get money," the publication of which excited such lively indignation. The ignorance of, or contempt for, what passes in this country, which has prevailed in Germany, during the last quarter of a century, among second-rate musicians, must have been already known to any who had passed

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about among them, and heard them speak freely.—Handel, Haydn, Beethoven, Weber, Spohr, Mendelssohn, knew better! But in my goings to and fro, I have heard things regarding this country of a contemptuous strangeness: as ridiculous as they were overcharged and inconsistent. Twelve years ago, in the town which tolerated the introduction of "Mein herz ist am Rhein," in the lesson-scene of "Il Barbiére"—and this not by the *Rosina*, but by the *Barber*—I was informed that we had no singers in England.—Six years later, I was gravely instructed by a *fräulein* who had a repertory of some four songs, that she was coming to London to fill the blank existing in our oratorios: herself cognizant of some two and a half by Handel!—How this can arise in a day like ours, it seems hard to understand:—but the idea of our ignorance is still as fixed, among certain of the Germans, as was that among the French of our "*God-dam*," so ingeniously recorded by Beaumarchais: or the wonderful Gallic superstition under which a French playwright enabled our Lord Mayor of London (a perfect *Gog* of greatness on the other side of the Channel) to transport the Heir Apparent of the British Crown—to the United States!

Let these things be as they may, whatever Mademoiselle Johanna Wagner might have effected had she appeared as agreed on in

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her original compact—the excitement of her non-appearance, and the confident promises of a legal verdict in favour of Her Majesty's Theatre, could not ward off the ruin which its manager had for some years been preparing with such blind assiduity. The public had lost all faith in the theatre, as was not wonderful—all trust in the daily reports of the superiority and success of every new singer.—It had been said, for some time, that private assistance had been strained to the very uttermost;—and the truth of the tale was proved in the fact, that the old Haymarket Opera-house closed A.D. 1851—not to re-open for three years—for the first time since it had been re-built by its Polish architect Novosielski.

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THE YEAR 1852.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula, "Norma," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Maria di Rohan," "I Martiri,"* "Lucia," "Lucrezia," "L'Elisir."—*Donizetti.* "La Juive."—*Halévy.* "Pietro il Grande."*—*Jullien.* "Les Huguenots," "Le Prophète."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni," "Il Flauto Magico."—*Mozart.* "Guillaume Tell," "Il Barbiére," "Otello."—*Rossini.* "Faust."*—*Spohr.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Castellan. Seguin.* Julienne.* Grisi. Zerr. Bosio.*—MM. Mario. Tamberlik. Ronconi. Ander.* Stigelli. Tagliafico. Bartolini. Gueymard.* Formes. Galvani. Negrini.*

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THE YEAR 1852.

THREE new operas were produced, each as distinct one from the other as well could be.—"I Martiri," by Donizetti, was arranged for the *Grand Opera* at Paris, from the "Poliuto" written for Naples, — which is said to have cost poor Nourrit his life. — On quitting France, unable to face the inevitable succession to his throne of M. Duprez, that poetical but too sensitive artist conceived the desperate idea of transforming himself into an Italian singer. He *would* not see that his day was done!—The disfavour with which his attempt was received at the *Teatro San Carlo*, where he appeared in this "Poliuto," exasperated his distress of mind, already verging on insanity, and brought about the act of self-destruction—one of the saddest stories of compulsory retreat in the annals of the stage.

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"I Martiri,"—though supported in Paris by Duprez, whose singing of the "*Credo*"* was prodigiously admired by our neighbours,—in no respect bore out the favour which had attended "La Favorita."—The opera is diffuse, the story is dull—containing a mixture of false Paganism and stage-Christianity, which the English have not yet learned to endure in Opera.—Then, the music is generally weak in effect, till the final duett of enthusiasm, which, of its kind,—including the inevitable modern use of unison,—offers good room for display to strong singers: though less exciting, perhaps, than the final duett in "La Favorita."—Here it was taken by Signor Tamberlik and Madame Julienne—the latter a French or Belgian lady, who had already sang in London, and who now aspired to serious Italian Opera.—She was entitled to do this by the quality of her voice,—a real *soprano*, full and vehement rather than rich,—and by her good stage intentions.—But the favourable impression made by the duett died away in subsequent performances of this and the following year.—Her appearance was not prepossessing: and even in 1852 (nor till the last, it may

* So much admired, that the effect was reproduced a couple of years since in M. David's "Herculanum"—originally intended by its authors to be "The Last Judgment."—This subject, however, was found "inconvenient," even by the much-enduring French.

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be said), had any new-comer the very slightest possible chance of disputing the occupation so triumphantly and despotically held by Madame Grisi.

Her resolution, not merely to have and to hold her own, but to take from others all that could interfere with her supremacy, during this very season, led the last-named remarkable *prima donna* into one of her few mistakes—her attack on Madame Viardot's great and self-created part in "Le Prophète." — Her failure was as complete on this occasion as it had been many years before, when she had been tempted to appear for once only as *Romeo*—it may be, in the hope of establishing beyond question her succession to Madame Pasta.

The second opera new to our Italian stage was the "Faust" of Spohr, which the veteran composer came to England to conduct in person. I have elsewhere* attempted to characterize the opera-music of this peculiar composer,—who in his choice of subjects and intention was so romantic, in his execution so mannered and insipid,—and to point out why, even in his own country, the popularity of all his works, excepting those especially written for the violin, had waned during his lifetime, and how admiration had passed off into placid, weary respect.—Even with that best will to relish and to cherish German Opera in England, which pre-

* "Modern German Music," vol. ii., p. 88.

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vailed for some quarter of a century among our amateurs, Spohr's musical dramas have been from the first found soporific.—"How many more lamentations are there to be?" said one of the most accomplished German musicians living to me, while waiting for the third act of "Jessonda."—Even the excellent performance at Covent Garden Theatre (allowing for the disadvantages which attend translated German Opera)—even the incomparable orchestra—the chorus not to be matched in Europe—even the veritable presence of the composer—could do nothing to change our apathetic respect into real enjoyment.—All was done that could be done in honour of an honourable guest, whose farewell visit to England this was understood to be,—but it was done with no result.

It would be hard to name any distinguished musician—as a man meriting the highest respect, and almost beloved in his own circle elect—who, to the outer world, seemed so cold and ungracious as Spohr.—Others have been as thoroughly self-engrossed—Spontini, for instance—but more courteous.—I shall not soon forget how I have heard Kalkbrenner, when elderly, mow down every other pianist and writer for the piano, more modern than Haydn (Beethoven among the number), with "a golden axe"—here admitting prettiness: there excusing an odd chord or two: anon remarking on

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peculiarities of execution—as very courageous. But all this was elegantly administered.—In the same humour, also, were the sarcasms of John Cramer directed against players who played what he could not play.—But these were cases of self-assertion in court-dress.—Spohr's was a case of callous, bovine indifference to every one except Spohr. He did not care—rather he did not know—whom he trampled down, under the flat hoof of his intense pre-occupation.—Yet the composer of "Faust" had not led a secluded life, to excuse his want of geniality in manner.—In his early days he had travelled much:—had mixed with men of many classes; and though in his later years he found himself under a hard and uncomplying taskmaster in the Elector of Cassel, who seemed to take a pleasure in thwarting him, Spohr had seen courts, and had been honoured at them.—There is no want of elegance in his music. A large portion of it is surcharged with a sort of faded grace, which cloys.—In person he was singularly dignified; but in behaviour his phlegmatic self-importance, and indifference to the claims of others, amounted to incivility.—During this last visit of his to London, he was to be met in every musical circle of any significance; but he strode about through them careless whom he inconvenienced—less gratified by cordial attempts contrived to do him honour, than made impatient by

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the hot weather,—or else, would sit dry, solemn, and inattentive, without one solitary kind word to say to younger musicians whom he had not till then known, or offering the slightest token of interest in any German music unless it was Spohr's.—I suppose he could laugh, but I never even saw him smile. He seemed,—in the world, at least,—to have no courtesy for women, no notice for children; to take everything set before him as a matter of course, — to give nothing in return.

This phlegm of self-occupation (I know not how better to characterize it)—this orderly calmness, maintained without effort, because without consideration for others—is to be felt in his music, and may be fancied as a reason why it loses hold on those the readiest to admit its many excellent qualities. Studied, as it were, from a distance, it is striking by its individuality: considered more intimately, it wearies by its monotony, till the hearer is apt to become unjust.—We were grateful to have an opportunity of studying "Faust" so carefully performed—and Spohr had changed, and amplified, and introduced other music (a grand air from his "Zweikampf" among the number) to fit the old work for the new house in London;—but few, if any, of our opera-goers desired to sit through the opera a second time.—Nor could it be said,

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that on this occasion the German music was betrayed by the Italian artists. Signor Ronconi, though insufficient in voice, played and looked the character of *Faust* admirably, and sung with unusual care. Signor Tamberlik's *Ugo* excited the only enthusiasm of the evening. Such failure as there was in the completeness of the execution of Spohr's opera, belonged to the Germans—Mademoiselle Zerr and Herr Formes.

The third novelty of this season was as different in character from the one just mentioned as is a rope-dancer (who cannot dance) covered with tags and spangles and tawdry ribbons, from a well-executed but rather oppressive German statue, cast in bronze.—That unlucky day on which it was decreed that money should be wasted in setting forth a grand opera by Jullien, is a date which belongs to the realm behind the curtain.—When will there be another such character before it as the composer of that opera?—Absurd as he was,—a charlatan who had succeeded in deceiving himself—wasteful, vain, disorderly,—the man was made for better things. There was good in him; a sort of pompous, comical, perverted enthusiasm—but real the while—for what was good.—Parisian critics, who recollect well their own Tivoli Gardens, where he had his dance-orchestra, and know England as Parisian critics do (not at all), have told the French

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world, that here he was reputed as great a man as Beethoven. Between such wondrous deification and utter disgust, there is still some truth to be told, now that the eccentric, tawdry creature, who so delighted in himself, and in his embroidered coats, and in his shirt-fronts—those wonderful works of stitchery—is no more. If Jullien was ignorant —as one so tossed about in land and sea in his boyhood could hardly help being—he had much mother-wit and kind-heartedness.—He could be and was humane and considerate to the people under his control—and this, too, when no credit was to be won by it.—He was further liberal to them, until his money-matters fell into that chaos, in which struggling folk have neither time nor breath to be nice, and in which only the really strong have self-denial enough to be honest.

He had deluded himself (bystanders aiding in the folly) into conceiving that he had a real genius for composition. — When the news of Mendelssohn's sudden death reached him at a rehearsal,— he stopped his band, smote his forehead with a tragical blow, in which there was a touch of genuine dismay and regret, and exclaimed to the bearer of the tidings, "This is what happens to all people of genius!—*I* will never compose any more!"— He had a humorous instinct for odd, orchestral mixtures of sound, largely wrought out by the

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first-rate players whom, in the first days of his prosperity, he gathered about him.—Year by year, his "Quadrilles" grew more and more elaborate, aspiring, and tremendous. Avalanches—Fires at sea—Earthquakes—Storms—Sacks of towns—Explosions in citadels—all melting off into some thunder of hilarity, loyalty, or thanksgiving at the close—were there. Whether he really wrote the amazing productions in question, or merely designed them, leaving others to work them out, and to correct any very glaring faults of harmony, is a mystery hardly worth solving.—They have vanished for ever;—now that his lovely and inspired behaviour is no more.

But, that such a man should have been accredited in producing an opera, at such an establishment as Covent Garden Theatre, is among the wonders of the time;—and more, that such a man should wake the morning after "Pietro il Grande" was performed, and find himself put into companionship with M. Meyerbeer before a reading public!—It was no wonder that one so feather-brained, so scheming, so grandiose in his expectations and self-conceit, should become bewildered, and at last lose such small amount of ballast as he had ever carried.—Of the opera itself it would be a waste of time and patience to speak,—superbly put on the stage as it was, with a luxury

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of characteristic Russian dresses, and soberly sung by no less experienced artists than Mademoiselle Anna Zerr and Signor Tamberlik, for hero and heroine. The attempt at practising on public credulity in bringing it forward was a piteous mistake, which must have worked—and did work—its own punishment.—No cost had been spared in presenting it.—The scenery was complicated, the dresses were gorgeous. There were dances, processions, (for aught I recollect, a battle and fireworks). The entire affair was perilous, as drawing down ridicule on a management professing such high aims as that of Covent Garden Theatre. Fortunately, it happened at the very close of the season, and the folly could be swept out of sight and memory before the curtain drew up in 1853.

Among new singers, the only permanent acquisition made to either Opera-house in 1852 was that of Madame Bosio,—the value of which, however, was imperfectly promised by her first appearance in "L'Elisir." Of her person everyone could judge; but her voice seemed that evening to be wiry, strange, perpetually out of tune, and her execution to be wild and ambitious. I remember no first appearance much more scant in musical promise, of one who was destined during her short career to become so deservedly great a favourite. But Madame Bosio was curiously made up of con-

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tradictions. Her features were irregular and ill-formed; yet, on the stage she passed for more than pleasing—almost for a beauty.—Her manner, which, in private was inelegant, after the first courtesies were over,—had in public a certain condescending gracefulness, which made up for coldness. Next to Madame Sontag, Madame Bosio was the most lady-like person whom I have seen on the stage of the Italian Opera. —This demeanour of hers, and her happy taste (or fortune, as may be) in dress, had no small influence on the rapid growth of her popularity:—which grew to exceed that of Madame Persiani, the lady whom she replaced, and whom by many was thought to surpass, though in no respect her equal as a singer.

There is no odder subject for speculation than the analysis of what is called "charm," and the power of assuming it commanded by certain persons, who have no inherent appreciation of it.—The power as certainly exists, as does the power to impress by nobility of nature and generosity of heart in many whose manners are rough, and whose speech is ill-selected.—Of Madame Bosio I shall have to speak again, in the record of later seasons.

Three new tenors, of first-class repute in Germany, France, and Italy, were tried.—Herr Ander,

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the delight of the Vienna public, and who, heard at Vienna, sounded delightful as compared with most of his comrades—M. Gueymard, who from *First Anabaptist* in "Le Prophète," had already risen to the place of first tenor at the *Grand Opera*, till now held by him—and Signor Negrini, who, in 1851, was one of the two artists in the greatest request when Signor Verdi's operas were to be performed, Madame Gazzaniga being the other. —It would be hard to say which of the three produced the least impression at Covent Garden Theatre. The German tenor, perhaps, looked and played the best, in the telegraphic German fashion: the Italian, certainly, shouted the most loudly.—None of the three were heard of in any after season at the Royal Italian Opera.

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THE YEAR 1853.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"Massaniello."—*Auber.* "Norma," "I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "Benvenuto Cellini."*—*Berlioz* "L'Elisir," "Maria di Rohan," "Lucrezia Borgia," "La Favorita."—*Donizetti.* "Robert le Diable," "Le Prophète."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Il Barbiére." "Guillaume Tell."—*Rossini.* "Jessonda."*—*Spohr.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Castellan. Bosio. Grisi. Albini.* Nantier-Didiée.* Julienne-Dejean. Medori.* Tedesco.*—MM. Mario. Tamberlik. Ronconi. Formes. Lucchesi.* Stigelli. Beletti.

* I find no mention of "Les Huguenots" in my notes of the year, but that opera was certainly given.

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THE YEAR 1853.

THE "old house," then, was fairly beaten out of the field by the new one. And, after all that had been whispered, and asserted, and published in print, the Italian Opera in Covent Garden had entirely superseded the house in the Haymarket, with all its traditional Fashion.—How certain persons had clung to this, with a constancy peculiar to loyal England, can hardly be believed. They had sworn (and, I am convinced, honestly,) that to drive five minutes further towards so vulgar a locality was impossible,—forgetting how the play-houses there had been mobbed by persons of taste, intelligence, and rank, to see John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons.—They had overlooked in their own dear domain the extinction of Fop's Alley,—and such sights in the pit as

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misbehaviours which would have made a chapter on manners in Mrs. Trollope's American experiences. They had endured bad music—they had defended inferior performances—on the plea that it would not do for any manager to yield to the dictation of a subordinate (the *onus* of the new establishment having been conveniently laid on Signor Costa's separation from the theatre). They had appealed to this and to the other printed praise of every performer, male or female, who had appeared in turn;—while, also, they had virtually declared that, when "one particular star" had vanished, the entertainment was no longer worth frequenting.—But there was no questioning the fact that, long before 1853 set in, the tide, fashionable and unfashionable, had turned to Covent Garden to hear great musical performances—and that in 1853 "the dear old house" was closed.

Mine is no miserable story of personal scandals; of undertakings ventured without money; of mortgages and bargains; of quarrels in the face of ruin, of the fathomless and endless proceedings of Chancery. Our law-reports have told that there had been enough and to spare of all such hindrances and drawbacks on the Haymarket Opera-house, from the time when its walls were raised.—But, it must be stated that one cause of wreck and disaster was the desertion of the theatre, owing

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to the systematic deterioration of its musical performances,—for which the temporary frenzy (the word is not too strong) excited by one wonder, offered no equivalent.—Real retrenchment of luxuries is economy; but the setting forth of counterfeit and inferior wares as equal to past splendid realities, is an experiment on credit, intelligence, and patience, which (no matter how it be sustained) can come to only one issue.

Three operas, not hitherto heard in England, were produced during the season.—The first was Signor Verdi's "Rigoletto"—in which, for the first time, that composer took some real hold of our public. It is by some spoken of as Signor Verdi's best work.—I have always found it dull, dismal, and weak: the ball-room music in the first scene clear of anything like vivacity — the music for the hunch-backed court buffoon,—M. Victor Hugo's *Triboulet* from his "Le Roi s'amuse," colourless, and to depend entirely on the actor's power of shifting from one mood to the other—from the ribald's silly wit to the devouring anxiety of a father, who knows that he hides a fair daughter from the eyes of unscrupulous libertinism.—Even *Rigoletto's* outburst of horror and rage, after the outrage has been committed which destroys two lives, is merely the old, familiar, flagrant *cabaletta*, which has done duty again and again one hundred times. It would be

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hard to name anything in the shape of an air of exhibition more puerile and affected than the song of *Gilda*, when she retires to her chamber—singing as she goes—on the night of her abduction.—Then, the bad weather which finds the desolate fair rambling close to the house of the hired assassin, which is to prove so fatal to the ill-starred daughter of the court-servant, has no bitterness in its wind and rain. —One excellent piece, however, "Rigoletto" does contain—that quartett, in which while the libertine *Duke* and *Maddalena*, the assassin's sister and decoy, are toying within the wretched hovel, the daughter and the father are shivering in the storm without. This is most ingeniously and effectively combined.—Further, the *Duke* has a popular song, the frivolity of which is not misplaced; and on these two numbers—on the coarse but forcible horror of the revolting story, and on the exceeding fitness of the actors to their parts—may be ascribed such favour as "Rigoletto" has gained in England.—As the Buffoon, it would be impossible to exceed Signor Ronconi,—in the the hour of his buffoonery, so pliant and degraded—so superstitiously terrified beneath the curse of the old nobleman, whom he is bidden to mock on the way to the scaffold; when alone with his child, showing the restless love and suspicion of an animal—after her abduction, so rueful in his at-

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tempts to be gay, as he creeps to and fro among the courtiers—eye and ear alert to discover any trace of her hiding-place—convulsed with fury and vengeance when too late he finds her, and when she flings herself into his arms, hopelessly outraged!—Nothing, again, could be more characteristic, heartless, careless, and withal fascinating, than Signor Mario as the *Duke*—the very charming royal rake, whom ladies have been heard to excuse as more sinned against than sinning—his beauty set off to perfection by his old Italian costume—a figure for Bronzino to have painted.—Yet more, in "Rigoletto" Madame Bosio made the first of those many advances forward which have been noticed; and was graceful, tender, and innocent—the very picture of one unable to cope with wrong—who had nothing left her, having been wronged, save to die.—Signor Tagliafico was excellent as *Sparafucile*, the Bravo; and his sister *Maddalena* was no less excellently personated by Madame Nantier-Didiée.—Her gay, handsome face—her winning *mezzo-soprano* voice, not without a *Cremona* tone in it, redeeming the voice from lusciousness—and her neat, lively execution—were all displayed in this part—short as it is.—For such occupation as falls to the share of a first-rate singer of the second class, this lady has never been exceeded.—Subsequently, when, tempted by

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ambition, and because of the scarcity of competent singers, she has tried to win first honours as a *contralto*, the natural limits of her powers have made themselves felt, and she has lost rather than gained in public favour.—In trying too high flights, she may have somewhat sprained her wings.

The second new opera, "Benvenuto Cellini," is to be described as a real curiosity.—For a year or two previous to this period, M. Berlioz, having made his great powers as an orchestral conductor known to us, and his almost equally great critical acuteness, when it is brought to bear on subjects which interest him, had secured a certain attention for his instrumental compositions. They had made that sort of half tempting, half tantalizing impression, which turns out well or ill for the works which are the object of it, in proportion to the amount of real truth, structure, and meaning they may prove to contain.—Then, late in the autumn of 1852, Dr. Liszt, always chivalrous in coming to the rescue of genius neglected or unfairly treated, had brought about a representation, in the little theatre at Weimar, of this "Benvenuto Cellini," which, on its production at Paris, had been cruelly maltreated.—The late Grand-Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, a lady of rare musical accomplishment;—gracious, and able to be liberal in all

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matters of art, had interested herself in the performance, and had contributed largely to its production in the utmost perfection within such narrow limits.—I was present at that performance, the excitement of which was remarkable—almost amounting to a contagion not to be resisted. Goethe's little town, in 1853, was taking no small credit to itself as having brought forward the new musician who was to set the world on fire—Herr Wagner.—There was something of self-glorification in this, if there was much, also, of that honest conviction which is indispensable to any temporary victory gained by fanaticism.—In those days M. Berlioz was rated by the Germans as among the transcendentalists—as a man who had suffered martyrdom in frivolous France, and had been neglected by ignorant England—because he was in advance of the time.—Every nerve was strained by sincere faith and goodwill to place his "Benvenuto Cellini" in the list of operas before which the world was to bow down, in forgetfulness of the Mozarts, Webers, Rossinis, as a race of well-meaning, worn-out pedants or triflers, who had amused an indolent public, unwilling and unable to think:—and whose day was gone.—The performance was nothing short of marvellous:—for the difficulties to be overcome were enormous.—The little orchestra did wonders in following the intricacies of the score; the singers (but, to be sure,

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they had been inured to Herr Wagner's operas) were steady in their parts, and if they sang too mechanically, it was the fault not of themselves, but of their composer.—He was present—the audience was heartily rapturous—and German rapture (how different from Italian ecstacy) is very seducing for the moment.—The real beauties, then, of this perplexed and provoking work, were brought as near to the comprehension and sympathy of those who heard it, as they will, probably, be ever brought. I was honestly interested by the experiment, and warmed by the cordiality of its manner, into forgetting the partisanship which belonged to it—though not convinced by the music.

Such having been the impression made by the composer in England, the tale of the triumph of "Benvenuto Cellini" at Weimar, which gathered amplitude by the way, made the trial of the opera here a natural, if somewhat a courageous experiment. The performance was prepared with great care, and the composer himself presided in the orchestra.—The evening was one of the most melancholy evenings which I ever passed in any theatre.

"Benvenuto Cellini" failed more decidedly than any foreign opera I recollect to have seen performed in London. At an early period of the evening the humour of the audience began to show

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itself, and the painful spectacle had to be endured of seeing the composer conducting his own work through every stage of its condemnation.—Be such an exercise of justice warranted or not, it is impossible to be present at any scene of the kind without real feelings of concern—concern in this case heightened by thinking how much good labour on good material had been thrown away, out of systematic perversity.

It will surprise those who only recollect "Benvenuto Cellini" by its performance, on going through the published music, to find how considerable is the amount of real idea existing in it.—In no other of its writer's works is the melody so abundant or so natural. Too often M. Berlioz bases his compositions on mere groups of notes, which have no claim to be considered as phrases, but are such as might be thrown together at hap-hazard, or, (what is almost equivalent,) by a fixed resolution to use what everyone else has rejected.—Betwixt incompleteness of early study,—a disposition to rebel and to resist belonging to a certain French period, and a too partial delight in the last compositions of Beethoven,—the value of clearness as indispensable to a work of Art—most of all a work of Music, in which rhythm claims so large a part—seems to have been for ever lost by him.—Not altogether to be classed with

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the writers of a late period in Germany, whose annulment of form may be referred to ignorance and incompetence—in his case, the unselect accumulation of feature and detail produces almost the same effect of distress and confusion to the ear as theirs.—It is his delight, in place of setting out his thoughts, to cover them. If the voice has a happy phrase—and in this "Benvenuto" some very happy ones are to be found (I will instance, among others, the duett of the lovers in the first act)—it is so smothered or hampered by a distracting instrumentation, that only the most cultivated experience can recognize it.—Often, a burthen otherwise, repetition of the theme—is so disguised, from a dread of being commonplace (which, by the way, is among the commonest fears of the unintelligent and half-instructed,) that it passes unperceived;—or there will be some allusion to it thrust in to some distant and heterogeneous part of the work, which throws out the most apt attention.—There is a *terzetto* in the first act of the "Benvenuto," in which, by way of too faithfully expressing the mystery of those who conspire "*aside*," (as the stage phrase is), a bright and animated musical phrase, of more sustained length than is frequent with the writer, is divided into such shreds, and with such ineffective changes of rhythm in the accompaniment, as entirely to be lost by those who have not a more minute

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acquaintance with the score than should be expected from any earthly audience.

Then, the ease of the singers is disregarded with a despotism which is virtually another confession of weakness.—As music, the scene, in the "second act," known in another form as its composer's happiest overture, "the Roman Carnival," has the true Italian spirit of the joyous time;—but the chorus-singers are so run out of breath, and are so perpetually called on to catch or snatch at some passage, which ought to be struck off with the sharpest decision,—that the real spirit instinct in the music is thoroughly driven out of it.

These things are noted,—not to depreciate a man of no common ingenuity and acuteness, so much as to suggest wherefore, owing to their misdirection, he has till now missed the reward which belongs to consistent labour, and high aspiration.—Among the most singular of modern phenomena is the verdict on the compositions of M. Berlioz, which must be passed by those who judge him according to his own code of criticism. Again and again as he has done, repudiating what is obscure, and every deification of ugliness (for which the French world has largely to thank the French *convulsionnaire* school of writers), it is wonderful, as illustrating self-delusion, to see how perpetually he has turned out of the

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broad and clear way of musical composition, to court obscurity and uncouthness.—And the result has been, that in spite of all his real fancy and invention—especially in orchestral sonority—his career as a composer has been virtually a prolonged struggle, unrelieved by a permanent success.—It may be doubted whether, when his own personal influences as an admirable conductor of a certain music—as a man notorious for wit of word and pen—as a combatant who, right or wrong, has fought for his own system,—have passed away—the works of M. Berlioz, pretentious though they are, and in some sense poetical, will keep their place:—and the sympathy which every generous person must feel for one, so earnestly striving, so often discouraged —so partially accepted,—is strengthened by the vexing conviction, that his case is not one of vacant vanity mistaking its occupation, so much as of a self-will, that has deluded its possessor into a labyrinth, from which there is little reasonable prospect of his extrication.

Of Spohr's "Jessonda" it is sufficient to say, that it shared the fate of his "Faust."—It was listened to with respect, and parted from with feelings of relieved *ennui*.

Towards the close of the season, two ladies arrived—Madame Medori, and Madame Tedesco—from both of whom something was to be expected.

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The former—a Belgian lady—if I mistake not, had been largely about the world, unable to find a home anywhere, ere she came to London.—We had heard, from those who ought to have known better, that her voice was superb—almost without a peer among *soprani*: that she possessed no small amount of dramatic fire; that she was to be, in truth, a real acquisition to any grand opera company. It was a pity that all this should prove a mistake.—Madame Medori was strong enough, in every respect, it is true, to satisfy the most exigent admirers of what is vehement—but her voice had acquired the habit of vibration to so terrible an extent, that on a long note, it seemed, sometimes first too sharp, and then too flat, or *vice versâ*, ere it settled itself—and Madame Medori had a propensity for long notes.—There was an undaunted rudeness in her manner, that bespoke either a nature without refinement, or one which had been vulgarized by practice in inferior theatres before inferior audiences.—Such a triumphant person (a wit once said that Vulgarity was always triumphant) appears to her worst advantage in the company of well-instructed, well-bred persons—since, from false notions of self-assertion, she is too apt to display every defect that she possesses, in the highest relief—want of ease, and the consciousness (not to be put aside) that she is unpopular, adding new

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points that must displease bystanders to those which are already part and parcel of her nature. The audience stared at her; and were puzzled at her boisterous ways.—She came and went in silence—but it became evident that England was no home for Madame Medori.—After London she tried Naples—after Naples the *Grand Opera* of Paris—with the same result everywhere.

Madame Tedesco, a *mezzo-soprano*, was unable to gain a footing here, for reasons totally opposite to those which rendered us averse to enthroning so riotous a person as the last-mentioned one by way of opera-queen.—She had then a precious voice—and commanded that which Madame Alboni tried for: a rich *mezzo-soprano*, two octaves and more in compass—of equal quality from its lowest to its highest notes.—I am inclined, on recollection, to consider it the most perfect organ of its kind that I have ever heard. But never was voice more completely thrown away.—The want is hard to specify—for it was everywhere.—Hers was a voice that can never have studied—it was, also, a voice without inflexion, without light or shade in it (things entirely distinct from *piano* and *forte*)—without power of execution, though it went duly up scales, and down the same, with a sort of composure more irritating than down-right failure.—Nothing but that placidity (shall it be called?) of temperament which is not

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to be animated by praise or blame, could have prevented its owner from taking a first rank among singers—could have supported her through the scene which (as I have said) I had some years before witnessed at Milan, when she had to sing throughout an opera—"Saul," by *Maestro* Cannetti—in *La Scala*, with the brutal accompaniment of a pit full of men—lovers of music, too!—who greeted her with a storm of opprobrious insults so often as she appeared—and, by way of a delightful joke, absolutely sang through the quick movement of her grand air with her.—The scene excites disgust and indignation as I write—and as I write I see the quiet, impassive figure on the stage come and go; and continue her part as firmly and quietly as if there had been dead silence round her.—When I saw Madame Tedesco here and in Paris, some ten years later, after she had succeeded better in more hospitable places, and had added some little to her vocal experience—it was impossible to avoid fancying, that what then I had admired as indomitable pride, as a resolution not to give her unmanly enemies the satisfaction of conceiving they had conquered her—might be ascribable to other qualities.

On the whole, this season strengthened the impression, which was already too strong, that the dearth of such singers as we had heard in former times was becoming, year by year,

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greater,—and tended to fix attention increasingly on what in reality has proved essentially the main musical stay and support of the Royal Italian Opera—its orchestra and chorus. Insomuch as the band of the *Grand Opera* in Paris — incomparable in 1836 — had become slack, and feeble, and slovenly — insomuch as theatrical orchestras so celebrated as those of Berlin, Vienna, Munich, and Frankfort (under Guhr) had disappointed the traveller—the increasing merit and spirit of our own rose by comparison. Foreigners—even those, like Herr Wagner the elder, who had conceived that England was a place only good to make money in—began to speak of its superior brilliancy—its amazing readiness in reading at sight—and its entire subjugation to its conductor: —the last not merely won by musical acuteness, but by moral promptitude, considerateness, and honour.

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THE YEAR 1854.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"Norma."—*Bellini.* "Fidelio."—*Beethoven.* "L'Elisir d'Amore," "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "La Prova d'un Opera Seria."—*Gnecco.* "Le Prophète."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "Guillaume Tell," "Matilda di Shabran," "Otello," "Il Barbiére," "Il Conte Ory."—*Rossini.* "Ernani," "Rigoletto."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Marai.* Nantier-Didiée. Bosio. Grisi. Viardot. Cruvelli.—MM. Ronconi. Tamberlik. Mario. Lucchesi. Susini. Tagliafico. Lablache.

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THE YEAR 1854.

THERE was nothing this year at Covent Garden Theatre that called for remark, save the accession to the company of Signor Lablache;—the first of Madame Grisi's many farewell performances; an inroad made by Mademoiselle Cruvelli, the result of which in no respect bore out her popularity in the Haymarket;—the appearance of Mademoiselle Marai, a useful and pleasing second woman, whose voice, after a season or two, somehow dwindled away; and the production of Signor Rossini's delicious "Comte Ory."— On the whole the season was a supine one:—and such stir as might be found in the opera-world, was among the Germans at Drury Lane.

The delicious "Comte Ory" has, with all the beauty of its music, never been a favourite anywhere. Even in the theatre for which it was written, the *Grand Opera* of Paris, where it still keeps its place—even when

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Madame Cinti-Damoreau was the heroine — giving to the music all the playfulness, finish, and sweetness which could possibly be given—the work was heard with but a tranquil pleasure.—Like the excellent "Le Philtre" of M. Auber (which, as I have elsewhere said, entirely outdoes "L'Elisir"—the Italian setting of the same fancy) it is too delicate for a large stage.—But like other of Signor Rossini's operas—may it not be said, all of them?—"Il Barbiére," "La Gazza," and "Otello," excepted—the music suffers for the story; and the composer, by his want of selection or disdain, proved once again his own enemy.—The rakish *Don Juan* of the old French ballad, who, with his band, enters the house of the retired Countess, disguised as nuns—as a character turns out to be more disagreeable than droll: and even the questionable adventure is not happily arranged—so as to keep animation in the story alive—though Scribe had a hand in its arrangement.—The book, in truth, is little less stupid than that of "Mathilda di Shabran"—with which opera it pairs off somehow.—It bears the appearance of its origin—a determination to turn to account the music of an occasional opera, "Le Voyage a Rheims"—written in commemoration of the coronation of Charles Tenth of France:—and in Paris performed by a bevy of singers such as no magic could call together now.—The composer was

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then already entering on the last stage of his career. —What entire transformations have passed over every world—most entire, perhaps, over his own—since then.—Yet he is still living and still jesting!

It will be seen, on turning to "Comte Ory," that the master was already in train for that alteration in his style which led to such magnificent results in "Guillaume Tell."—Without having lost one iota of the freshness of those days during which the introduction to "La Cenerentola" and the sestett were thrown off,—and the capital concerted piece, "*Oh guardate*," in "Il Turco,"—a felicitous curiousness in the modulations is to be observed,—a crispness of finish,—a resolution to make effect by disappointing the ear,—which not only bespeak the master's known familiarity with the great music of the greatest classical writers,—but, also, his wondrous tact in conforming to the taste of the new public whom he was to fascinate.—"Comte Ory" is essentially a French opera;—and, as every French opera must do,—loses by being sung with Italian words.

Yet—be it French or Italian—what is there in vocal music that can exceed the final *trio*—ridiculous though the situation may be?—The life, the unexpectedness,—the delicious union of the voices (to repeat an epithet), without undue platitude or perplexing intricacy—the dainty orchestral touches

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modestly—not timidly—introduced, precisely in those places where the ear is the most surely reached—make this *trio*, of its kind, a masterpiece —one not requiring the distortion of unnatural study for its comprehension,—but which at first hearing speaks home; and which, if examined later, will repay the examiner, as every specimen in which beauty, symmetry, fancy, and spirit are combined must do.

By an odd coincidence, this year was given, in London, another comic opera, and another masterpiece, which has mainly failed to produce its due effect, since the time of its first production, because of the feebleness of the story—"Die Entführung," or "Il Serraglio," of Mozart, which was executed rather than sung, by a coarse German company, at Drury Lane Theatre.

This year again there was an attempt at French comic Opera at the St. James's Theatre, insufficiently made—as, indeed, could not be avoided. It is obviously impossible to transplant all the elaborate machinery of Parisian theatres to this distance; and on the piquancy of every detail no small portion of effect depends. Heard out of Paris—even in such opulent towns as Bordeaux (with its magnificent theatre), Marseilles, Lyons —French comic Opera loses much of its brightness. When it is provincial, it is impoverished in

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no small degree. This may be thought to imply a criticism on the music, as of an inferior class—if proved to be so largely dependant on execution; but I should rather point the moral against the amount of excellence in performance to be procured in the country. For the comic Opera of France there must be neat and pungent singing (if with beauty of voice so much the better—but our neighbours are not famous for beautiful voices)—cleverness in speaking, so large a share has dialogue in the pleasure—adroitness and propriety in action, so as to contribute to making an entire picture—and, last of all, perfect taste in costume. Then, there must be an excellent orchestra for accompaniment, (which, in these days of orchestral writing, when the score is surcharged with half a score of instruments not dreamed of half a century ago,) cannot be a small one.—All these things are provided for in Paris, by Government assistance. In England, with the best will, and the greatest liberality imaginable, they can but be shadowed out—only presented in outline.—The first lady in this French Opera company was Madame Cabel; one of those peculiar singers so numerous in France, who have execution almost without limit, an infinity of dash and adroitness—but no style, and no sensibility. In Paris—though, subsequently, M. Meyerbeer *did* select Madame Cabel as the heroine of his Breton opera

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—there was always a touch of what is provincial (to use the word with no contemptuous sense) in Madame Cabel's performances, in spite of her voice, which was superior in quality to the voices of most of her sister singers.—I found her—there as here—second-rate; but her flights and her feats, for a few evenings, astonished and attracted our public, and did their part in familiarizing English amateurs with enjoyment in French Opera.

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THE YEAR 1855.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"I Puritani," "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Fidelio."—*Beethoven.* "L'Elisir d'Amore," "Lucrezia Borgia."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "L'Etoile du Nord," "Le Prophète."—*Meyerbeer.* "Il Conte Ory," "Il Barbiére," "Otello."—*Rossini.* "Ernani," "Il Trovatore."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Bosio. Marai. Bürde-Ney.* Nantier-Didiée. Viardot. Rüdersdorff.* Grisi. Baür.*—MM. Gardoni. Tagliafico. Zelger. Lucchesi. Formes. Graziani.* Mario. Tamberlik. Lablache.

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THE YEAR 1855.

THE year 1855, though a prosperous opera-year, was not rich in variety. Two new works, however, were given, both of which must be dwelt upon.—"Il Conte Ory," with Signor Gardoni the graceful as hero, was repeated.—"Fidelio" was tried again, for the introduction of a German lady—on that evening when Napoleon the Third, Emperor of France, visited Covent Garden Theatre in state with our Sovereign Lady.—What a strange commentary on chance and change was this, to those who recollected our Imperial guest as the quiet and retiring frequenter of a box at the old Opera-house, before and after the expedition to Boulogne; and who recalled the derision which had attended the very few who then dared to speak of that event as one which might as probably have turned for better, as it did for worse, to him who adventured it!—The tale of its accidents has, possibly, yet to be told.

Signor Verdi this year, at last, arrived at his

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real popularity in England—not equalling that of Bellini, but surpassing that of Donizetti—by the production of his "Il Trovatore,"—the work among his works in which his best qualities are combined, and in which indications scattered throughout earlier productions present themselves in the form of their most complete fulfilment.

The story, it need not be told, is of the most paltry quality; one that might have been gathered from some extinct novel of the Minerva Press,—in place of the Spanish romance, little known on this side of the Pyrenees, from which it was derived.—What is more, it is next to unintelligible.—But the library of Drama numbers some curious modern examples of interest and success excited, independent of clearness of narrative or sequence of events.—Which of us can ascertain what really happened among the personages of the "Hunchback?"—There are stories that get hold of the public, if, even, every approved artifice of that neat carpentry, which was carried to such a wonderful refinement by Scribe, be violated in their contrivance: and the tale of "Il Trovatore" is among them.—To this day many persons have not found out the right and wrong betwixt the false child roasted by the Gipsy in mistaken vengeance, and the true one, spared, and mistaken, and flung into all manner of miserable dilemmas—and at last beheaded, in order to

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give the avenging Fury an opportunity of saying to her noble persecutor, "*He was thy brother!*"

No work which is to last can be constructed on such an invention as this,—because every half century has its new extravagancies: whereas Truth, and Love, and Self-denial, have been the same, in their simpler workings, ever since the world began. The most intricate combinations of Scribe will go out of fashion. "La joie fait peur" of Madame de Girardin—the title of which might be versionized as "How to break *good* news!"—will live, I verily believe, so long as there are people who have yearned for the lost and the untimely dead.—The former can afford no character, no real emotion, for the artist to deal with.—Such a tale as the latter, goes home to the human heart of all time.—For the moment, however, the tangled monstrosity of the story of "Il Trovatore,"—was overlooked, in the admiration of Signor Verdi's music.

On this work—as the favourite Italian opera of to-day—or yesterday—there might seem no need to descant,—did it not, in some sort, contain, as has been said, a quintessence of all that Signor Verdi has derived, combined, and originated;—with something of his own,—and might it not thus become an object of some curiosity to those who may read and refer,—long after it has been swept off the stage,—not, impossibly, after a musical stage has ceased to

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exist.—The mixture of platitude with rugged invention—the struggle to express passion,—the attempt at effect,—in two important points (the "Miserere" one of these) wholly successful,—have been equalled by Signor Verdi in no subsequent opera;—nor did he before, nor has he since, been so happy in tenderness, in beauty, in melody.—"*Il balen*" has been the ruling London tune for five years, as undeniably as "*Di tanti palpiti*" was the tune some forty years ago!—when barrel organs were (and brass bands) as one to ten!

One of the points in "Il Trovatore,"—which may be found worthy of remembering—after this or the other tune has passed into the limbo of old tunes—is Signor Verdi's essay at vocal Spanish gipsy colour. The chorus of waifs and strays opening the second act has an uncouthness,—a bar or two of Oriental drawl,—before the Italian anvils begin,—which must remind anyone of such real gipsy music, as can be heard and seen in Spain.—Thus, also, is the monotonous, inexpressive narration of the gipsy mother, *Azucena*, to be animated only by her own passion,—all the more truthful (possibly) from its want of character. No melody really exists among those people,—and the wild cries which they give out could not be reduced to notation, were it not for the dance which they accompany.—Signor Verdi may have com-

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prehended this—though with insufficient means of expression; at all events, some notion of the kind is to be found in what may be called the characteristic music of "Il Trovatore."

There is much more in the "Miserere" scene—a picturesque beauty, and an originality not to be doubted or denied by anyone to whom the stage speaks—though the leading phrase of the concerted piece might never have been found, had not there been an apparition scene in "Semiramide," in which Signor Rossini had shown how terror might be told in rhythm.—The introductory air for the heroine is new in its forms of melody and accent; and the combination of her voice with the voice of her lover—and with the chorus also, unseen—is captivating.

"Il Trovatore" (or rather, the heroine of this dismal opera) was introduced here—under some difficulties—by a German lady who had not sung in Italian ere she came to this country—Madame Bürde-Ney.—It would be hard—even among her richly-gifted countrywomen—to name a *soprano* voice more rich, more sweet, more even, than hers. It was a voice better taught, too, than the generality of German voices—a voice delivered without force and inequality—with due regard to beauty of tone, and grace in ornament.—But the new language and new accent hampered Madame Ney; and her powers as

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an actress here seemed to be only limited.—Thus the main requisite for the performance of Signor Verdi's music—a certain violence of emphasis and expression—was denied to it; and such spirit as could be thrown into the opera was contributed by Madame Viardot, in the dismal character of the Spanish gipsy mother.—Her few bars of *cantabile* in the last scene, where sleep comes over her while she sings, were among the most exquisitely beautiful and pathetic things heard on any stage.

The song "*Il balen*" exhibited to its best advantage one of the most perfect baritone voices ever bestowed on mortal in Signor Graziani. Such an organ bestowed by nature as his is a golden inheritance; one, however, which has tempted many another beside himself to rely too exclusively on Nature.—Be the song ever so lovely—be the voice ever so round, and full, and honeyed—the charm of "*Il balen*" must wear out in time, when not supported, or varied, by other attractions.—It has, apparently, done so in the present case.

Possibly, too, "Il Trovatore" has already lost that popularity, in all its fulness, which its music enjoyed for awhile. There is no returning to the work as a whole, for reasons already indicated—the essentially superficial and showy nature of its effects.

Totally different in character was the other new

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opera of the year.—"L'Etoile du Nord" has been justly styled by that acute critic, M. Berlioz, as the most highly-finished example of M. Meyerbeer's peculiar manner, which that master of combination has given to the world.—It must be evident, however, to all who consider the work, that his subtlety of combination has betrayed him—not merely in the ordinance of the music—but also in the arrangement of the story.—Never did Scribe, who could bring into one play the Heptameron of Marguerite of Navarre, and into another comedy everything possible and impossible, so as to make a heroine out of La Maupin, the strange Amazonian opera-singer—twist and torture his imagination and control over stage trickery, more artfully (and less successfully) than in the case of the "Silesian Camp"—a stupid work, written for the inauguration of a new theatre at Berlin, as a sort of occasional Court opera, intended to glorify the Great Frederick and his flute-playing—when the same must needs be transformed into a Russian story, for Paris.—But this turning, and dyeing, and twisting process is opposed to all simplicity of invention;—and within its coils, and loops, and ties, there is too much chance of the most clear-sighted man—the man most solicitous for effect, losing his way, or being strangled.—Till the end of the second act the story of "L'Etoile" moves, it is true—not

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probably—but with an improbability which is found moving. Later, follows one piece of musical display after another—a *trio* for three men full of cleverness—left out in Paris, but in London admirably executed—a long mad scene for the heroine, —including her trio, with two flutes, (a portion added to the old, original Prussian opera,* in order to exhibit the remarkable power over tone and breath commanded by Mademoiselle Lind)—but nothing that leads the tale to any conclusion, which is natural, or can be admitted, for Romance's sake. This may be ascribable to delay, timidity, to an over-solicitude as to effect, nourished and cherished by every success, by every experience:—since the score of "L'Etoile" contains pages full of pure, original ideas, as clearly designed as they are sharply wrought out.—To instance—a rare enjoyment, and humour (not over-refined, it is true) and a capital combination of two women's voices and tongues,—are to be found in the Suttler-duet, in the tent scene of the second act, such as raise that piece, in a musical point of view, far above the level of manufacture.—It is comical and artistic; and, in both respects, of the best quality.

Elsewhere, with all his ingenuity, M. Meyerbeer has been in some degree paralysed, by the requisitions of a story arranged and re-arranged,—and by

* "Modern German Music," vol. i., pp. 281, 2, 3, 4.

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his own desire to outdo himself.—In the *finale* to the first act, there are three choruses: the bridal one of peasants—that of the recruits—that of the drinkers,—each having a melodic phrase of its own—and the three are so inwrought that, when the frank, brilliant winding-up comes, there is left no impression of patchiness or dislocation.—But the eye, on perusal, is aware of this—not the ear:—and the phrases themselves, meanwhile, must have suffered, in the resolution to pare them into a working—or, as theatrical folk have it,—a practicable shape.—There is no limit to combinations of the kind—provided the matter combined is trite enough. Such things exist as masses for sixteen choirs—in which it would perplex the analyst to fix any feature, or form, or even harmony, such as give to the huge construction anything like colour or character.

The combination of the old and common-place Dessauer March, at the close of the second act,—with the fife quick-step (which is no tune)—and the Cossack military music, (which is yet less a tune)—with the prayer and chorus of principal voices—laid out so as to accommodate themselves to the emergency desired—affords another example, of what is not genius and not effect—howsoever it may excite wonderment in the ignorant world.

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But in the second act of this "L'Etoile" there is a coarse, camp element not existing—not indicated—in any other musical drama. And, in this, we may touch the peculiar genius of M. Meyerbeer; and in this, I can see, on recollection, how Lablache—who was always contriving, always understanding, always inventing—found his last amusement and occupation in personating the gross, semi-stupid savage, transformed into a military official, and thereupon bewildered into a conspiracy—who ties fast the knot of such story as exists in this strange opera.—I cannot conceive that there was ever a veteran artist who, on the eve of his departure, left so fresh, so distinct a print of his foot on the ground, as Lablache left in the character of *Gritzenko*. He could not have done this, had there not been some incitement to enable him so to do—in the rough, real animation inevitably belonging to a military opera,—which excited him, and brought out every particle of his powers—vocally—but not intellectually failing.—This last personation by Lablache was among those masterpieces which it is as well to remember as to regret—seeing that what Man has done, Man may do. I think that he was content with it himself. The only time—during a quarter of a century's public intercourse—that I had the honour of speaking to him was, when he sought occasion to express his pleasure, in respect to a

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few honest words of mine, with regard to this opera and his share in it.—"You have made," he said to me, "an old man very happy."

Otherwise, in many respects, "L'Etoile" went amiss in London.—The hero, Herr Formes, could not satisfy anyone who had seen the original *Pierre* of M. Bataille.—He did not sing the music perfectly. He acted too much, in critical junctures. —Then,—though Madame Bosio as the heroine was charming and delicate: and in her disguise of doublet and hose, what a *Rosalind* should be—and though, as her peasant sister-in-law *Prascovia*, Mademoiselle Marai did her best—the two picaroon suttler women in the second act (most essential to the story and the music, and how excellent in Paris!) were condescending in London:—half ashamed, thoroughly doleful. They drummed, as a pair of disguised Princesses might do—they sang their capital duett without fire, or fun, or accent.—All the intricate and clever and effective music that belongs to them fell dead on London ears. The fault, in fact, might perhaps lie with the master, from his having sought in Opera what cannot be produced in it—a union perfectly balanced, of music, song, and farce, —and this may always bar the work from chances of its being adequately represented, in the most complete of musical theatres, out of Paris.—There women can act without beauty, and can sing without

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voices,—and draw out every point to the uttermost of its pungency, without pedantry or caricature. The loss to this second act, of the original language, and the original *vivandieres*, can hardly be over-estimated.—But the entire opera is cruelly lamed by translation: for many reasons. One of these is the amount of *staccato* music.—From first to last, there is a perpetual application of word to note —at variance with all Italian fancies, as to singing, and as to what the singer should be expected to do:—and, save in broad comedy, creating a perpetual impression of fatigue to the listener. There is one quiet tune, which was *the* final tune of the Prussian opera, re-made for Paris—and which passed, almost unobserved, when "L'Etoile" was given at Berlin. Yet even that quiet tune—the heroine's prayer at the end of the first act—wants a second part.—Then the romance for the *basso* in the last act, intended to be penitent, expressive, and suave, is, in reality, maukish—a song to be avoided rather than courted by any singer: as one without nature, however seemingly simple.

Under Parisian conditions, these peculiarities were little felt,—the restlesssness of character passed unperceived: but, on being paraphrased, it became dry and tedious: and to this may be ascribed the limitation of the success of the opera,—as compared with

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ers by its writer. In none has he been more lividual—in few more melodious.—The Gipsy ndo in the first act,—the song with chorus of ls given to the peasant bride—the Cossack ncer's tune in the camp,—the jolly Infantry ng, with its irresistible brethren,—in the third , *Prascovia's* little romance:—are all specimens the master in his happiest mood—"snatches of ng," clear and sweet enough to make one regret at there is so much of mere "snatch" in M. eyerbeer's works—and that any effort on his part work out a theme or a subject is so often ac-mpanied by loss of power, timidity, mannerism, d the use of recondite expedients to conceal real verty of resource.

"L'Etoile," again, suffers on the Italian stage, the substitution of sung for spoken recitative; d by M. Meyerbeer's substitution of recitative companied—for the free, musical talk, with a ord to sustain it,—by aid of which the com-sers of past times connected their dramatic uations, and their display-pieces.—Rich as is is modern manner of working, it, nevertheless, rcharges the work with ornament—deprives e hearer of any chance of rest, and stiffens an era into a symphony four hours long.—There is breathing; no waiting;—and the set musical eces, whether they be songs, choruses, or elabo-

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rate combinations, when arrived at, have already lost some of their importance, owing to over-preparation.

Such are a few outlines of M. Meyerbeer's fourth French opera, as presented in Italian, here. —How far its success might have justified the care and cost lavished on its production, cannot be ascertained; for the fire at Covent Garden Theatre swept it away,—I can hardly fancy with much hope of its frequent return. — The work is, throughout, Parisian, and not like "Les Huguenots," universal.

There were more farewell performances of Madame Grisi, in some of which her obvious resolution not to be displaced, seemed absolutely to restore her to her splendid powers of other days. Her career may be said to have been remarkable in the length of its autumn.

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THE YEAR 1856.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "La Figlia," "Lucrezia," "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "La Cenerentola," "Tancredi."—*Rossini.* "Il Trovatore," "La Traviata."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Alboni, Rizzi, Albertini,* Piccolomini,* Wagner,* Amadei,* Bauer.*—MM. Calzolari, Beneventano,* Zuccone,* Baillou,* Salviani,* Bouchè, Baucardè, Reichardt, C. Braham.*

BALLET.

"Le Corsaire."

Principal Dancers.

Mdlles. Marie Taglioni—Rosati.

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THE YEAR 1856.

HER Majesty's Theatre re-opened with every outward sign of prosperity. The house was crammed nightly—to all appearance the audience was delighted with the singers, good, bad, and indifferent; and one artist was brought forward, to reproduce the golden days of Mademoiselle Lind; and who absolutely did, for a short time, fascinate the foolish part of our opera public—into a belief that in her arrival a new revelation.

There had been the usual trumpets blown before-hand; with some variation in the tunes.—After tales of Swedish parsonage-houses—after the coronetted book handed to "the Countess" to sing from—after the volume published in proof that Madame Sontag's return was an interposition of a special Providence, on behalf of a temple of Art fit object for such peculiar care—after the fac-simile of Madame Pasta promised in the daughter of her adoption and the inheritress of her secrets—invention could hardly have been easy; seeing, too, that it had

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already been tried in half a score of less prosperous forms. There had been the Viennese children, rescued, it was said, from the clutch of the Jesuits, in whose spiritual welfare virtuous sovereigns had been interested.—There had been a negro woman, with some of the inborn musical skill belonging to her race, paraded with the insulting title of The Black Malibran.—There had been the mystery of no mystery belonging to Donna Lola Montez—absolutely brought to dance on the stage—as the daughter of the celebrated *Toreador* Montez—at a time when she had no less absolutely, beyond her indomitable impudence, fewer requisites for her dancing appearance before our public than those taken by her to Paris—and which, on her disgraceful failure at the *Grand Opera*, drew from M. Jules Janin, one of the most lacerating and bitter pieces of criticism ever provoked by audacity.—After all these devices, which must have cost labour to discover them—and after the ruin which they had helped to bring on the theatre,—it seemed strange that a new campaign should be tried again, on no grounds of art more solid than those of appeals to the old worn-out quackeries.—But it was so:—and apart from the real attraction to musicians of Madame Alboni, who never sang better than she did on the re-opening night of the "old house"—and the next piquant promise of the certain appearance

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of that engagement-breaker, Mademoiselle Johanna Wagner, whom our Courts of Law—and whom commissioners sent out to examine her—had exalted into a surpassing value, strange to those who had fathomed her real worth as a singer,—London was prepared for the advent of a dazzling beauty—the favourite pupil of the most renowned singing-master in Italy, Signor Romani—a young lady of noble Roman family, driven by her irresistible propensities for the musical drama, into open variance with her relations (this clause in the legend was not of the newest);—and, to clench and crown all —A CARDINAL'S NIECE!

The little lady, herself, I believe, may have never, herself, set the wondrous tale a-going. But her career and her popularity in England were odd, and the story thereof is not to be escaped from.

No greater sign of the decay of the old Italian art of singing could have been shown than in the temporary success of Mademoiselle Piccolomini.—Her voice was weak and limited—a *mezzo soprano*, hardly one octave and a half in compass.—She was not sure in her intonation: she had no execution. That which was wanting she supplied by a behaviour which enchanted several of the persons who sit in the stalls. Her best appearance was in "La Traviata." The music of the first act pleased,

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perhaps, because it is almost the solitary act of gay music from the composer's pen; and her effrontery of behaviour passed for being dramatically true to the character:—and not, as it afterwards proved, her habitual manner of accosting her public.—In the repulsive death-act, too, she had one or two good moments of serious emotion, though this was driven at times to the verge of caricature, as when every clause of her last song was interrupted by the cough which belongs to the character.—But the essential homeliness of her "reading" of a part, which could only be redeemed by a certain born refinement indicated in the frail heroine, was to be seen when Madame Bosio undertook it, at the rival opera-house; and when, by the superior delicacy of her treatment of it as an actress, she effaced the forwardness of her predecessor.—To compare the two as singers, would be simply ridiculous.—"La Traviata" showed all Mademoiselle Piccolomini's paltry resources. She never improved in her singing—but she exaggerated the gaieties and gravities of attitude and gesture in every subsequent attempt.

Never did any young lady, whose private claims to modest respect were so great as hers are known to be—with such self-denial, fling off their protection, in her resolution to lay hold of her public, at all risks.—Her performances at times approached offence against maidenly reticence and delicacy.

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—They were the *slang* of the musical theatre;—no other word will characterize them:—and *slang* has no place in opera, be it even the broadest *opera buffa*. —When she played *Zerlina*, in "Don Giovanni," such virtue as there was between the two seemed absolutely on the side of the libertine hero,—so much invitation was thrown into the peasant girl's rusticity.—Musically, the little lady was essentially a *vaudeville* singer,—a *Columbine* born to "make eyes" over an apron with pockets—to trick the *Pantaloon* of the piece—to outrun the *Harlequin*, and to enjoy her own saucy confidence on the occasion of her success—with those before the footlights, and the orchestra.

But Mademoiselle Piccolomini had one great gift—that of speaking Italian with a beautiful, easy, finished pronunciation and accent, such as few have possessed,—and she had an air of impertinent youth: and so, for a while, she prevailed, where less appetizing pretenders to favour had failed to prevail before her.—Further, she was patriotic:—and in Italy she had harangued serenaders—even as Madame Schröeder-Devrient did in Dresden—from a balcony, with her hair let down—even as Mademoiselle Rachel prudentially consented to do, when, grasping the Republican flag, she propitiated the Red People in Paris of 1848, by declaiming to music "La Marseillaise,"—(to be re-

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paid afterwards, by her being compelled to re-enact "the sensation" at the order of a New York public.)—But neither magic nor management,—nor her delicious Italian speech—could transform Mademoiselle Piccolomini into an artist who had a year's right to keep any musical stage of importance.—The old and the young gentlemen did their best for her:—and she repaid their best,—so far as the demeanour which they admired, and her own capital Italian accent could do, to make amends for singing utterly worthless.—But the show could not last—even in days like ours, when singers are few.—It was worn out ere she left the stage, and, accordingly—for every world concerned, it is surely the best that Mademoiselle Piccolomini vanished, and early, from inferior singing, pretty acting, and equivocal by-play—into private marriage.

By way of adding to the excitement, there arose —or, it may be said, there was got up—a controversy concerning the good or bad morals of "La Traviata," as a piece to be accredited or condemned.—That there is an unwholesome interest in the story, is evident from the fact of its having been the first of a series of bad dramas, which have since taken possession of the Parisian theatre—for the exhibition of simple and compound female frailty in modern guise.—The fulmina-

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tions against it, as excessive in its licence, must have been felt as ridiculous by any one familiar with the musical stage; who are compelled to admit that the Opera-House can never have been considered as a place in which our Art has been devoted to the service and illustration of that only which is high, and pure, and righteous.—It was the commonplace nature of the sin and shame and sorrow, which revolted such persons as were really revolted, and which absolutely provoked a Manager's defence of the tale, as conveying a salutary warning to the young men of our times!—The serviceable hypocrisy of such a plea was inevitable, as a reply and a retaliation—a wretched expedient to pique the jaded palates of play-goers: though but in harmony with that state of French society, which could delight in the dreary, morbid social anatomies of Balzac's novels.

It may be questioned if anything could furnish a stronger argument to those who attack stage representations, than the manner in which the Parisian stream of vicious fashion drew in,—not only the impure—but the pure,—than the spectacle of a faithful wife and a devoted mother, such as Madame Rose Chèri was,—lending herself to the personation of all that is destroyed and depraved—by illustrating a world, in which even such illusions as can cling to such

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disorders belonging to it, are ended by shame and misery.

But it might have been seen, that whatever was the temptation of the spoken drama "La Dame de Camelias" was a story untenable for music. Consumption for one who is to sing! A ballet with a lame *Sylphide* would be as rational.—Yet, the opera, which failed signally on its first production (as better works have also done) became, for a while, an universal favourite here:—and the tale, and the music, and the little lady who brought the two hither, delighted a section of our public; and they were seriously discussed, as though dramatic worth and reality had been in both. They served their turn—till a year later, when Madame Bosio, as I have said, by the elegance of her singing and performances, made the want of refinement in Mademoiselle Piccolomini so obvious, as to hasten the destruction of a spell—which, to the discredit of our musical taste, had lasted far too long.

One of the events of the year 1856, which, though not presented on any opera stage, was not to be forgotten, was Madame Viardot's singing of a scene for *Meduse*—the music by Lulli. The music was stiff—bald (as modern critics might put it)—but true, as affording scope to the highest, and the most free deamation, and having a grandeur of line (to

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adopt the artist's phrase), which can only come of grand imagination.

I have already adverted to the appearance and disappearance, at the Haymarket opera, of our countrywoman, who sang as Madame Albertini; and who, in Italy, enjoyed during some years, a success analogous to that gained of Madame Schoberlechner, Madame Gazzaniga: and to half a hundred of those mediocrities whom the depreciated taste of the time has fostered into a short life. She arrived in England, so far as could be guessed, under some strange idea that London was to be stormed, even as Italian cities had been by her. When will the foreigner's fixed idea—so strangely ignorant — of musical England be corrected? —Mr. Ebers, in his curious book concerning the Italian Opera, told that when Madame Borgondio, a *prima-donna* now nameless and never famous, came to try her fortune in this island, she dragged across the Alps with her, her own pianoforte: being afraid of finding none in this desolate home of—Broadwood and Erard.— I have myself been gravely asked by a German conductor of repute and research, within the last six years—and without any sarcasm meant —whether there were any Chorus-singers in England? But the English *dilettante*, or artiste

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who has grown into foreign life, as to a second nature, is a character, so far as I know, yet more hopeless to deal with—whether he be the student enamoured of *Bürschen* rudeness in Germany—or the opera-goer, inured to bad music, bad orchestras, bad singers, in Italy, who raises his eyes in pity for a less enlightened tourist, that can protest against the noise he has been hearing the night before—and against the man who treats, as something *fossil*, every suggestion that the brawling, bawling fancies of the hour, during a time of transition and discomposure, when orchestral and vocal music are in conflict, need not surpass—because they are *of* the hour—those triumphs of Art, won by study, which have enrolled the names of some former—and happily still (some living) singers—in a record, imperishable, so long as music shall exist.

Nevertheless, Madame Albertini, though it was not convenient for her (or the theatre) to sing a second time—was hailed by the convenient audience, as every one of her predecessors there had been before her. She did not use a good voice badly, so far as I recollect, nor like one uninstructed—so much as like one having a voice, without a spark of musical or dramatic intelligence.

I have now to speak of a third disappointment and a far more ponderous one—in the failure of Mademoiselle Johanna Wagner.

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This, as I have said, was one of the ladies who make themselves interesting by breaking contracts, and who also seems to have cherished the strange fancy that, in coming to England, she was invading a savage country, where gold grew. It seems stranger that, beforehand, these German folk have not learned that England nourished Handel—that England commissioned Haydn—(that *from* English influence came Haydn's greatest lasting work, "The Creation") that from England could money be sent to Beethoven, when (fantastically, as is evident) he conceived himself dying of want. But this is not their instruction. They have "bettered it," as *Shylock* says—and, accordingly, the lady, reputed to be a great artist—having made a first engagement in London, was deceived, or entangled, into the facilities or the difficulties of a second engagement—became an object of contest in Courts of Law: and an object, not the least in the world acceptable in the Court of Courtesy, howsoever attractive as an object of curiosity. Once, the breach of an engagement can be found charming; but it is a mistake to try the trick a second time: especially on so small a capital of qualifications as was the lady's.

Be these things as they may, Mademoiselle Wagner arrived too late in our solid money-grubbing England, to do her purse or her theatre much service.

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The voice had not recovered the weariness which was to be heard in it at Berlin, in 1852, when I heard it there; because the voice had not been rightly trained. She was most striking to see, but the mechanical vehemence of second-hand German acting proves less attractive in London than at Berlin. *There*, as part of a picture (got up by machinery), and as addressing a public to whom the style of elaborate violence is congenial, it can be submitted to. Here—it seems extravagant, pedantic, and distasteful, in no common degree. The German actor's alphabet (I do not here speak of such admirable artists as Seydelmann, or Emil Devrient, who make a law for themselves out of a pedantic formula), has always struck me as singular and limited. I have a book in which dancing is taught by diagrams: "*Here bend—there twirl—when you offer hands across—smile*," and so-forth: and I think that this book must be the text-book for many actors whom I have seen on the German operatic stage. One can count their steps whether in advance or retreat. They kiss in time—they go mad telegraphically. This may be very meretorious; it is clearly most popular in Prussia: but here, it is not found welcome, after the first impression of strenuousness has passed over.

Considered as a singer, the claims of Mademoiselle Wagner were very meagre. She must

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have had originally a fine *mezzo soprano* voice. She can never have learned how to produce, or how to use it. Whether as *Romeo*, or *Tancredi*, or *Lucrezia Borgia*, the insubordinate toughness of the organ could not be concealed. Though she dashed at every difficulty, with an intrepidity only to be found in German singers, none was, in very deed, mastered. Then, the surroundings and supports of the new heroine, were beneath mediocrity. I will pass over them, for the sake of charity and civility. Not even the loudest efforts of commissioned praise could delude the public into enduring these performances, or accepting them as successful.

Elsewhere I have adverted to the fatal and impracticable mistake, made by the Germans, in all that concerns appreciation and practice of the singer's craft. The question is, however, worth returning on: if Music is to live on the stage, in any other form than that of tasteless declamation accompanied by an orchestra—nay, too, and for the interests of instrumental music,—lest the time should come when everthing like executive facility, charm of tone, and grace of manner, shall be discouraged, in the violin player or the clarinet player, or the pianoforte player—as they have lately been in the throat and chest and lips of the *Rosina*, or *Fiordiligi*, or *Susanna* of the hour.—The monstrosity of imagin-

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ing the progress of Art insured by stripping it of any resource, is among the abuses of modern times, which really can only impose on the understandings of rational beings by the force of impudence. There is a rudeness against which the highest breeding can make no head—a blank courage of falsehood, which almost destroys the possibility of power to investigate—and the musical fallacy referred to is, in its world, as flagrant as these social assumptions. To disdain material, is to reduce art into savagery;—to paint with three colours instead of six, is to go back to the china-plate, or the old heraldic pictures of the Blue Lion, and the Green Man. Yet, now, under pretext of eschewing meretricious devices, the singer who commands the entire range of his voice, real or acquired—be the music quick or slow, brilliant or expressive—is becoming so rare in Germany and Italy, that a mass of musical works, which have a life and beauty of their own, are vanishing out of notice, because of the depreciated state of modern execution. Those gracious resources of old fancy, which added the last charm and polish to composition (space being expressly provided for them by the composer), lie under the ban of disapproval—and this in a time which has seen the revival of decorative art so signally brought about, as almost to promise new combinations, new luxuries, new

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pleasures, to deck such idea as in these wasted times, when Invention is so outworn may still present itself.

Such being the circumstances under which Her Majesty's Theatre re-opened, such being—the artists who appeared there, it seemed obvious that let what would happen to the rival opera-house, an entertainment managed on principles so entirely at variance with every sound principle of art, could not retain favour, at a time when the old, fashionable reputation of the theatre had been so perseveringly vulgarized and destroyed;—and when musical knowledge was so obviously on the increase among those whom money, in support of a theatre, had replaced the coronets in the boxes, or the delight of the full-dressed loungers, who, in times past and gone, had crowded Fop's Alley now suppressed.

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THE YEAR 1856.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

OPERAS.

"I Puritani."— *Bellini.* "L'Elisir," "Lucrezia."— *Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni."— *Mozart.* "Le Comte Ory."—*Rossini.* "Il Trovatore," "Rigoletto."— *Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Bosio, Maria, Grisi, Devries,* Burde-Ney, Nantier-Didiée.—MM. Tamberlik, Graziani, Tagliafico, Gardoni, Ronconi, Formes, Neri-Baraldi.*

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THE YEAR 1856.

THE destruction by fire of Covent Garden Theatre was the great opera event of this year:—one which was thought by many—perhaps hoped by a few to be—conclusive as to the fortunes or misfortunes of Italian Opera, in this country.—Though no terror was added to the catastrophe by the loss of life, the same was sufficiently dismal and startling.—Violent destruction, whether it befall a dancer at a ball,—or a place of amusement, which has been full of gay sights and sounds,—comprehends a contrast, which adds pain to every sight,—to every thought of wreck and disaster.

Perhaps, too, there are no ruins so haggard as those of a desolated theatre. That mysterious, ill-understood world behind the curtain, with all its inlets, and outlets, and contrivances, when it is rent into tatters, wears an aspect strange to those who have an eye for what is fantastic.—There is in Madame Dudevant's "Consuelo," a

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grotesque and poetical study of the stage by daylight:—when the theatre is in prosperity and occupation.—By way of as match to it, a study of the ruins of a theatre, the morning after a fire, would make yet a more strange and suggestive picture.

To keep together the band, the chorus, and the principal artists, in the hope of better days, was all that was possible, and the Lyceum Theatre, being fortunately accessible, offered a shelter to the Royal Italian Opera. Some of the performances gained by transfer to the smaller locality—those, especially, of Signor Rossini's music—in which Madame Bosio distinguished herself by the grace and finish of her singing.—Hers was a case of nightly improvement.—She began, too, to act with sensibility, if not with force: and succeeded to more than the favour with which Madame Persiani had been regarded; though less consummate a mistress of her art—and less various in her ornaments.

The two new singers who were tried, Madame de Vries and Signor Neri-Baraldi, had different fortunes. The fine voice of the lady could not give the slightest interest to her performances.—The gentleman at once settled down into the place which he has since occupied, as an available singer of the second class, most valuable to any opera company.

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Truly delicious was one of the works presented, which, for many a long year, had not been heard in London, Signor Rossini's "Comte Ory." Like its maker's "Moise," it must pay the penalty of his thoughtlessness, or of his arrogance, as may be. The story is not worth the music. The coarse, chivalresque old French ballad,—in which the Brigand Count assails the household of a *Lady Eglantine*, as subject for an opera, comes off third best, after "Don Juan," and after "Zampa." The story is one to be avoided, rather than treated: —and this must have been felt by Scribe: who nevertheless was not scrupulous in avoidance of questionable matter.—It is a sensual farce, when presented on the stage: nothing more.

On this unpromising canvas, the musical embroidery of the original bad pattern is lovely enough to rise to the point of being magical. (There *was* magic in a certain embroidered handkerchief—in a certain tragedy called "Othello.")—There is not a bad melody:—there is not an ugly bar in "Comte Ory." Its writer—thrifty and predatory, as, before him, Handel had been (there are more analogies between the genius of these two great men than have been till now set forth), used again, and wrought up in 1828, for "Comte Ory," materials which had been flung into an operetta of the moment, "Un Viaggio a Rheims," written, in the year

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1825, for the coronation of Charles the Tenth of France, and sung by such a company of artists, as it would be impossible in these days to assemble. But for the benefit of the prudes and the pedants, the treatment of the first *finale* may be pointed out, as an example of the uttermost mastery over vocal effect, attained in modern times and under modern forms. Throughout this *finale* the entire treatment of the bass voice, as supporting, animating, answering its comrades, is as new as it is brilliant.

In the second act, the drinking chorus of the roistering Count and his troop, who have arrived to "flutter the dove-cote," is not to be overlooked, though, to some, it may seem only so much stage music:—The wonderful and willing adaptation of an Italian to the French style, was never more clearly shown than here. After the Count's charge of the convent, the original story must needs be suppressed; but music could not help breaking out in the final *trio*. As regards the combination of voices, I know nothing more exquisite than this movement—and more exquisitely it could not have been rendered than by Madame Bosio, Madame Nantier-Didiée, and Signor Gardoni.

To turn the artists to account, certain opera concerts in the nave of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, were organised—novel, attractive, fantastic, entertainments—in preparation of which the exhi-

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bition of any musical research was impossible, and which owed much charm to the peculiarities of scene. There is so little likelihood of their being reproduced, that an attempt may be made to fix some of their features on paper. In localities so vast, some effect, and no small part thereof, of any musical performance must belong to the eye; to association, to scenery.—Nor is this wholly to be disdained, in its own times and places, save by those severe or fastidious students of art who can only travel down one groove—only respond to a few peculiar touches—only endure that which is fast or slow—loud or soft—in accordance with their own temperament. Perhaps, the same feelings which give such an exquisite relish to the quartett of chamber-music when executed to a wish, by the choicest players; for few of the choicest auditors,—may enable the listener to enjoy music taken more easily: if even the voice should become "a wandering voice"—if even the hearer should lose here power—there a chord—a vibration somewhere else, owing to the vastness of the arena in which they are exhibited. The ear, the eye, the heart, in those who really care for Art, must change—if, also, they would range—their pleasures.—Here, the caprice with which the Italian music travelled, penetrating into strange corners of the courts overhung by greenery—or behind some crowd which interposed, or out even

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of the vast vaulted space into the open air, was a never-ending object of curiosity;—with its suggestions totally apart from those of any orderly concert. —To Madame Grisi's voice the space gave youth, to Madame Bosio's power.—To one and all of the men, the place was unbecoming—though there were to be heard *words* (in particular from Signor Ronconi), when the tones seemed swallowed up. A freedom, a singularity, and a gaiety, were in the whole entertainment, which, for a season made it a fresh variety, though one affording no opportunity of musical study or comparison. Naturally, on repetition, it tired: but, as a passing pleasure, having a real use and object, it was agreeable and cheerful—with associations which might be allowed to balance those of the tall, blackened, gaping ruins, among which pageants, gorgeous to the eye, had been marshalled, and Music admirable to the ear had been sung.

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MADAME RISTORI.

THIS year, as once before at the elder opera-house, the musical performances were alternated with foreign dramatic representations,—to introduce the only actress who, though under widely different conditions, had made a sensation in Paris, which recalled,—and some declared—rivalled that excited by Mademoiselle Rachel.—Even while the French tragedian was alive, Madame Ristori, in a language little comprehended by our neighbours (the worst of European linguists), and in a drama, unfinished as compared with their own,—contrived to hold fast the attention of the pre-occupied many, and to gain the highest praise from the critical few. —As *Medea*, in a translation of the tragedy by M. Légouvè, which Mademoiselle Rachel had rejected

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—as Alfieri's *Mirra*—in the drama which so moved Byron, and to which English censorship so rightly refused an entrance—as *Maria Stuarda*—this beautiful Italian woman gained a renown which amazed everyone—her own jealous countrymen not the least—for *they* could tell, with true Italian jealousy, how, year after year, at home, she had come and gone as an actress of the genteel comedies of Goldoni, Nota, Giraud, and faded translations from the intrigue-plays of M. Scribe:—or, if not jealous, the Italians would boast that they had twenty *Melpomenes* at home, equal to her.—I have seen one or two of these, since then, with wonderment at the Italian genius for fiction, or singularity of appreciation as may be.

At Naples, when I was there, a Mademoiselle Sadowski was put forward as the equal—nay, rather as the superior, to Madame Ristori.—At Palermo, I saw a Signora Cazzola, who had pretensions no less showy. Both were kitchen-maids, as compared with a queen.—Among men, the acting and declamation of Modena, violent, emphatic, and full of life, were made trebly forcible by the amount of political and patriotic meaning thrown into them:—and later, I have seen Signor Salvini,—in the plenitude of his force, and comeliness;—and as *Orestes*, with that sort of sudden, fierce intinct which is irresistible; but Madame Ristori,

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as the great Italian actress, will remain the type of her class and country: one who exhibited her art, —as few have done,—with a power—a grace—a variety,—hardly to be summed up in a sentence,— or told over in a chapter.

It was significant that, in Paris, the new Tragedy Queen, could sit on Rachel's throne: —but here only a very few persons were really interested in her coming—partly from the sudden haste with which her reputation had burst out— partly because of our national averseness to novelties.

Although a few tourists, habituated to the South, had brought home tales of the wonderful mimic powers of artists who supported the acted ballet, (or tragedy in dumb show) of Italy—though a few students had mastered the "Fillippo" of Alfieri, and Manzoni's "Conte di Carmagnola," and Pellico's "Esther," and (in later days) Niccolini's "Arnoldo"—though opera-goers had trembled before Pasta, and been swayed, which way he would, by Lablache,—a public for Italian acting with speech—and still more for the drama of Italy—had to be created in England, when Madame Ristori arrived.—Her reputation in Paris, be it repeated, was of recent date;—there were half-a-dozen oracles of fashion, fresh from foreign embassies, who could declare that she

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had no renown at home; and that they recollected her performances at fairs and festivals, to an audience of tenpenny stalls. Far different in every respect had been the notes of preparation and of expectation which had here heralded Rachel.

If the Germans reason too much (it has been said) about their pleasures, in art—our countrymen assuredly look and listen too idly—think too little—and in their too unscrupulous love of being amused or excited without much trouble—make too many mistakes — fall too mechanically into the groove of a set fashion.—To be constant to old favourites is a noble virtue; but into our constancy there enters too large an element of narrowness and antagonism.

The style of acting, which is individual to every country, is more marked in Tragedy than in Comedy; and this not merely because of the different material on which the artists have to work, but because, in proportion as passion becomes intense, distinctions of bearing become prominent.—How very much Shakespeare, Schiller, Corneille with his rhymed *tirades*, Alfieri with his harsh compressed diction—would lose, if set in the same key—by any one tragedian capable of dealing with the four languages—cannot be summed up in a few lines.—But let the same story of pity or terror narrated in one form of words be told by persons

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belonging to the four different countries,—and as it happens with the same notes of the musical scale when sounded on different instruments,—the identity will be lost, in the varieties of its conveyance.—The Englishman will break out into wrath at one point;—the German for another, prepare his effect, by solicitous approaches;—the Italian will make his hands eloquent, and carry the spectator off in them, as by a whirlwind;—the Frenchman, in a fourth, will sting, by some terrible word or look, into which the entire scene is concentrated. —When entering a theatre, it is just as well as not to make one's self a countryman of the actor. This is not our habit—as the author of "De Vere" says in the mouth of one of his most delightful characters—"we English are slow to move."

Further, the accounts which preceded Madame Ristori's coming, from the few who were interested, differed as widely as darkness from light.—There were admirable judges of acting, and persons as just as admirable, who pronounced the performances of the Italian lady a coarse show of melo-dramatic rant.—On the other hand, from three tragic actresses of high intelligence, belonging to three countries (two still on the stage) I heard enthusiastic praise. Each of the three—it is worth noting—lingered on a different point of excellence, in a whole which was excellent.—One on

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the pathos and expressiveness of her diction and the melody of her voice,—Two, on the magnificence of her demeanour, the originality of her attitudes, the drapery, which never cumbered her, never seemed to have been arranged — but was always picturesque,—Three, on her power of reconciling the sharpest and most daring contrasts by the intensity with which she threw herself into the situation. It was striking, to say the least of it, to see how completely the new comer had contrived to fascinate and impress three gifted sisters in her art, without the slightest tinge of affected magnanimity, or covert rivalry on their parts.

Such conflicting evidences from those in whom there is full reason to repose trust, are calculated to bewilder rather than to prepare. As this is a book of recollections, it may be said, that betwixt dispraise and praise, whereas I felt great curiosity—I had no sensations ready to take fire, on my first seeing Madame Ristori in "Medea."—I can but add, as sequel, that, whereas, in the case of Rachel, I was never carried away so as to lose power of observation, comparison, objection,—in that of her successor,—the spell was complete, and irresistible, for the time.—But the traces left by Madame Ristori are printed so deep and clear,—that I feel less hesitation in attempting to analyse and describe the peculiar powers of the great Italian actress who

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so moved me,—than I have shown in regard to the great French tragedian;—who was to me always a study—always a genius—but never a subduing power.

It is a nice question, whether that which is foreseen, or that which is unexpected—in imaginative art and personation, is the more powerful to move. — The combination of the two — rarely possible—when it *can* be attained, is resistless.* This I found in many of Madame Ristori's performances. She was not so sinister as Rachel,—but more fearfully in earnest.—With the former, an experienced watcher of her performances, could not only see the storm brewing—but specify the

* No illustration can represent this with faultless exactness; because there is no regulating or estimating the prophetic apprehension, or the instant sympathy, of those who are moved:—otherwise the catastrophe of "the Bride of Lammermoor," might be cited as an incomparable example of suspense and surprise. The reader, from the moment of *Ravenswood's* departure, has looked forward to his return,—and by degrees, has been assured, that his return would come too late. There is no astonishment, then, in his sudden apparition at the contract-table on his fatal day.—Not so as to the interruption of the bridal ball, in the murder-shriek from the nuptial chamber. We were prepared for evil; but not for a horror such as this.—Yet the second scene would have been impossible, had it not been preceded and prepared for by the first one:—the catastrophe of hideous affright and amazement, by the previous awful fulfilment of long-drawn anticipation.

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place at which it would burst forth.—With the Italian lady, one could never be prophetic, however troubling had been the alarm of spirits—however expectant of the thunderbolt had been those awake to and afraid of the storm.—In her case there was nothing of one scene slighted—in order that, in some subsequent one, a *tirade* might be wrought up to an explosion.—There might be "points" (as the stage dictionary goes) neglected *here*—passages exaggerated *there*—but there was nothing that could be foreseen, as having been provided for:—and this (to my thinking) gave as much freshness as force to every effect produced by her.—Then, the lovely Italian language, "*la dolce favella*"—can have never been spoken by a voice more musical.—Of Italian accent no Englishman can dare to be critical,—but every word came from the lip of the speaker as clear and round as a pearl—and with a variety of inflexion and utterance—only to be attained by a speaker, with a melodious voice of extensive compass—Madame Ristori had half an octave, at least, more of notes than Rachel—and the instrument on which she discoursed was throughout more tuneable.

As an actress, Madame Ristori can never have been exceeded in versatility,—a qualification, as I may have elsewhere observed, anything but a recommendation with the mass of the public, all the

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world over,—and most especially in our own country.

Nothing could be more distant in reading, in treatment, in voice, in gesture, in attitude, than her Gothic fury in Alfieri's "Rosmunda"—from the suave, yet intense and pathetic grace of her *Pia di Tolomei* in Marenco's tragedy.—The first, as an expression of every hateful passion which can thrill through the frame of a beautiful woman having power, might match as an example of intensity with Rachel's *Roxane.* There is a scene (the second) in the third act, which was unparagoned, in its power. For there, the actress without speaking, or disturbing a passionate encounter between two violent spirits, so linked herself with their dialogue, and so led the action on, that the explosion at the close was as tremendous as the memorable "*Sortez*" of Rachel.—The Gothic Fury, who holds captive a King's daughter, with past vengeance pent up against the King,—and a loathing that longs to wreak itself on the head of her innocent victim—is surprised by discovering that her warrior lover, the chief of her army, on whom she had lavished honours and bounties (not the least of these her love)—has left her past recall, to fling himself at the feet of her prisoner. She surprises them together: she taxes the recreant with his infidelity and ingratitude—and, desperate in his passion—he avows it in her

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presence—to the horror of its object:—who replies with the utter scorn and detestation of one who feels that an avowal such as this is the last bitterest torture of her dreadful imprisonment.—How *Rosmunda* watched this scene: hardly able to contain the frenzy of agony which the discovery had bred,—of suspicion against both—of passion flung back by the minion whom she had endowed and repaid;—and how she listened, agape as with thirst, yet cunning all the while, not to lose the drawing of a breath, the winking of an eyelash;—how, when her rival's indignant retort, thrust on her the conviction that her traitor was foiled, she turned to him, with a smile more terrible than any outcry,—a smile which said, "And *this* hast thou won!"—these gradations of mood live in my recollection as something more frightfully distinct, in their power, ferocity, subtlety, and yet beauty, than has been seen elsewhere in our time.

How far from this,—as far as tender, yet not insensate, patience is from savage cruelty,—was her representation of the noble Italian lady, done to death by jealousy, in the poisoned air of the Maremma! as delicately, as gracefully—southern of the South—as her *Rosmunda* had been of the North, northern.—The last act is simply the slow death of the wife, suspected and sentenced by her jealous husband.—Her entrance, pale and languid:

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as if every fibre of her frame, every drop of her blood, had been infected by the slow death of the prison-land to which she had been exiled—with the leaden eye, and the failing step, of one unable longer to support herself unassisted—and the breath drawn heavily—were touching and fearful in their gentleness and grace.—Then followed the interview with the peasant girl, who like herself had known a cruel heart-sorrow — in which the Lady gathered up her few fragments of wasted and wasting energy, to listen, to comfort, to sympathize—(the Lady above the vassal—howbeit the two were equal in their womanhood and their sorrow)—and lastly to beg the kind offices of prayers in *her* turn, when the other wounded heart should come thither again and find hers at rest.—And then came the tidings unexpected,—overcoming,—that the Lord, whom she had never ceased to love, was approaching—the hope, fluttering on the remnant of its last broken wing, that he might be coming to forgive—to clear—to save her—the shading of her eyes already blind with death, from that stifling sun-glare,—that she might make sure it was he—that she might see him coming—the quick, hurried explanation—the pardon on his repentance, the desperate struggle of Love against Death,—and of young Life towards fresh air and happiness—all in vain!—all paralysed by the infection

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of that fearful dungeon—and then her mournful "*Too late*"—and the hoarse, broken tones,—and the eye glazing in its fixed look of forgiveness;—I know not whether it is right that the emotions of Life's last hours—so deep—so sacred—so awful, should be shown on the stage; but the scene I have so imperfectly followed, returns on me, as I write, like a shadow of some real, sorrowful experience.

Another example even stronger than the above contrast, comes before me too vividly to be passed over in this attempt to produce a character of a grand artist.—*Mary Stuart* was notoriously one of Madame Ristori's favourite heroines. Though her beauty is not that which agrees with the records extant of the beauty of the Queen of Scots, she had beauty in a larger measure than most of Mary's representatives have possessed,—somewhat, too, of Medicean grace and subtlety; Further, like a true Southern woman, she held the belief that the Catholic Queen was an innocent victim to stern English Lutheran tyranny. In the first act, her dignified grace of demeanour,—her self-possession,—her calmness—were so little according to our ordinary stage-usages, that, when they were first presented in London, a spectator exclaimed—"Why, she has not acted at all!" "No," was the reply of his neighbour, "but we have been in a royal presence."—The great, well-

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known scene, where History in Schiller's play is righteously violated in order to afford the decisive interview between the rival Queens—in seeming so much more arduous—is, in reality, far easier to carry through than such an outward show of tranquillity, sustained without insipidity, so as to indicate the ebb and flow of emotion beneath the surface.—The effect in the encounter is, more or less, secure, with any actress competent to attempt the character at all.— In Madame Ristori's case, with all the force required, there was a *finesse* which tempered the earlier portions of the dialogue, adding motive and provocation to every speech of Mary's enemy, retarding the climax, and sharpening the sting of sarcastic taunt and passion when they did at last flash out.

All this had subsided into a holy faith and submission, majestic, yet still womanly—ere the scene of leave-taking betwixt the vanquished Queen and her weeping followers, and her martyr-progress to the block began.—I have seen on the stage nothing more real, nothing more highly finished, within the conditions of a peculiar conception—nothing more tender and touching than this.—I recollect it as I do some strain of poetry or music, heard, when the spirit was the best disposed to receive its influence—and never again to be parted with in life.—That act stands with me, as a show of the

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real catastrophe at Fotheringay—and mixes itself with my pleasure, in my recollection, of those scenes, so graceful, so fascinating, and so tender, by which Scott has given to the world the captivity of Rizzio's patroness, and Darnley's widow at Lochleven, and her flight from prison,—for a few short hours of liberty and hope.—There is no undoing the work of the Romancer—neither of the real Artist.

One so thoroughly penetrated by such a character as that of Mary of Scotland, as Madame Ristori, might have been assumed as unable to form the slightest idea, save in hateful caricature, of the nature of her English rival—still less to offer a portrait of Elizabeth, which should be otherwise that overcharged and repulsive. How admirably Madame Ristori achieved this—and in a paltry historical sketch by Signor Giacometti,—it remains for me to commemorate. A more signal triumph of Art over antipathy—a more complete mastery over all that is least familiar, in thought, character, bearing—a more brilliant example of the sharpest contrasts reconciled—of that which is violent, harsh, and imperious invested with a dignity which makes us not only endure, but positively admire it, can never have been exhibited by man or woman.—The honesty and daring of this personation were only equalled by its queenliness.—Nothing was shrunk

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from—nothing touched with that false colour, the nature and form of which are open to the two interpretations—and which is therefore hazardous, save when managed with the most consummate tact.—Her grand Italian features, it is true, could not be thrown into those of Anne Boleyn's daughter;—no renunciation of the flatteries of dress could give the actress a resemblance to one whose life was nourished on the most elaborate personal flattery. But the crisped red locks were there—and there were the gorgeous ungraceful robes, which Zucchero painted; and the voice was harsh and decided—not incapable though, of blandishment to an Essex, nor of diplomatic friendship to a Burleigh, nor of the monotony of cunning that would hide itself from itself—when her "Sister's" death-warrant was the matter in which she would take no part!—Elizabeth in this trumpery Italian play, has her scene of wrath—as well as Mary in Schiller's tragedy. How different the one from the other!—The dramatist could not lose the opportunity of presenting the box on the ear given by her to Essex (say the chroniclers) in presence of the court. The form of the personal outrage, however, is modified. The Queen, in the play, —as a contemptuous nobleman might have done—strikes her favourite on the face with her glove. How her rage, ill-curbed from the first, hurried on the Sovereign to so vulgar an indignity—how there

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was a moment's reaction of shame,—and the instant after such wilful recoil the Queen's determination to abide by what the Queen had done, and to justify it; so as positively to grasp the sympathies of those whom anything short of such a displayof audacious power and self-assertion, must have disgusted:—were so many touches of the highest—boldest art in the hands of which power to reason becomes extinct, and emotion takes whatsoever form the artist pleases. I have seen the scene, in Italy, given by other actresses—and so given ridiculous and intolerable.

The English Queen's tragedy, like Mary Stuart's, closes with a death-act. Here the well-known French picture in the Luxembourg, of the haughty Elizabeth—wrestling with solitude, remorse, and Death—stretched in her brave attire, on a pile of cushions—had suggested the treatment of the situation to Madame Ristori;—but the painter's suggestions were outdone and bettered by the actress. She did not shrink from presenting the figure now familiar to her audience, in the last stage of decay and decrepitude. The tiring and curling of the yellow hair, once so carefully tended, could no longer be endured by the feeble, failing woman; it hung round her haggard face and her hollow, sleepless eyes, in long hanks, which her fingers

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could hardly put aside. Her entrance was that of one tottering into the grave—her voice, hoarse and weak, was imperious still, and not without a quivering tone of its old elasticity. She sunk on her couch of sleeplessness, without power to choose the position in which the most ease might still remain for her. When she turned her head—for she *would* turn it—to be sure that she was alone, with no eyes of espial on her lonely death,—the glance of shrewd suspicion which flickered across her face was ghastly indeed. To the close of this wonderful scene (perilled by the folly of the dramatist, in the introduction of James the First), the decay of every natural power, in its least lovely form, and with no memories or regrets to soften or soothe its dreariness, was wrought out with a fearless reality which avoided nothing.—Painful as it was, however, it was not revolting.—We were beholding the last moments of one, in whose force of will, and vigour of intellect, and full consciousness of the grandeur of her sovereignty—the absence of grace, gentleness—of such womanly affections as heal, not destroy, was forgotten, as something inevitable—and forgiven, as though it was a necessary part and appanage of Rule, Ambition, and Victory.

Such are only a few among the many lasting impressions made on me, by the most remarkable

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actress whom I have ever seen—one whose power, while I was before her, utterly destroyed all possibility of comparing or measuring, but who has left behind prints such as are only made by realities—not shows.

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THE YEAR 1857.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"Fra Diavolo."—*Auber.* "I Puritani," "La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Maria di Rohan," "Lucia," "La Favorita."—*Donizetti.* "Il Trovatore," "La Traviata."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Bosio. Balfe*. Parepa*. Marai. Nantier-Didiée. Devries.* MM. Mario. Gardoni. Neri-Baraldi. Ronconi. Polonini. Zelger.

Principal Dancer.

Madame Cerito.

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THE YEAR 1857.

THE performances of the Royal Italian Company were this year resumed at the Lyceum Theatre, under the accustomed cloud of rumours.—There would be no new theatre, said those who were afraid of one.—The resources of "the old house" had been refreshed by yet another miraculous interposition; and the old favourites, who had been affronted thence, seven years before, on the plea of their being worn out, were about to be brought back thither in triumph:—as if the value of an artist was to be changed by a removal from the Strand to Charing-cross! It is a real gratification to think of the ruin which attends all such malicious attempts to injure; most of all, when "the shop over the way" has any connexion with the arts, whose mission, say the preachers, is to humanize mankind.

This second Lyceum Season, like the former one, being merely provisional, it followed that no great amount of novelty could be attempted.—Yet there was one, too remarkable in the finished per-

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fection with which it was presented, not to be remembered with the liveliest pleasure—the Italian version of M. Auber's "Fra Diavolo."

In London, where this opera was dressed for the Italian stage, with sung, for spoken recitative, something of its artless vivacity might be lost: even though the composer had made additions and allowed interpolations from other operas, so as to enhance the importance of its scale. But never can the music have been so deliciously sung and played as by Madame Bosio, Mademoiselle Marai, Signor Gardoni, Signor Ronconi (whose travelling Englishman in a nankeen suit was incomparable as a piece of whimsical farce), Signor Neri-Baraldi, and the two brigands, Signor Tagliafico, and M. Zelger. One and all seemed to enjoy the gay coquettish music, and the frolic of the story—which even the tragical ending of the bewitching robber-hero fails somehow to sadden. I remember no instance of execution throughout, more even, more smooth, more fine, and more lively. When, a year later, the same opera was transferred to the more vast stage of the new theatre, some part of its vivacity and grace were gone; since every effect must of needs be in some degree exaggerated. A real Watteau picture, however, remains to be one and the same; let it be shown in the most dainty and luxurious of cabinets, with its own light and its own accessories—or let

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it be hung in some gallery, with a Rubens on the one side of it, or a Giulio Romano on the other.

Then, the distasteful and feeble opera of "La Traviata" was represented at the Lyceum Theatre to such a perfection, as to give the death-blow to the success of the lady who brought it to this country, being there sung and played to perfection by Madame Bosio; with that half-elegance, half-distraction of manner, which alone could make such a heroine supportable for the purposes of musical art. Whereas Mademoiselle Piccolomini (on the stage) was the willing *grisette*, Madame Bosio was the woman whom bad chances had driven into fitful recklessness. She sang the music of the first act admirably. In the two others, there is little or nothing worth the trouble of singing.

Of the two young English ladies who appeared during the season, for the first time, there is no need to speak, since the two have since made positions elsewhere. Neither is Madame Ristori's tragedy to be returned on; though in this, her second English season, some of her greatest and most subtle triumphs were achieved.

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THE YEAR 1857.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"I Puritani."—*Bellini.* "La Favorita," "La Figlia del Reggimento," "L'Elisir d'Amore."—*Donizetti.* "Don Giovanni," "Le Nozze."—*Mozart.* "Il Barbiére."—*Rossini.* "Il Trovatore."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Spezzia.* Ortolani.* Piccolomini. Alboni.—MM. Reichardt.* Stecchi-Botardi.* Beneventano.* Giuglini.* Bèlart.* Rossi.* Corsi.* C. Braham. Beletti. Vialetti.

BALLET.

"Esmeralda."

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Rosati. Marie Taglioni. Pocchini.*—M. Charles.

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THE YEAR 1857.

THE events of this year clearly foreshowed the decay and second closing of Her Majesty's Theatre, which shortly afterwards came to pass.—No new operas were promised—nor performed. The fury of admiration for Mademoiselle Piccolomini declined as rapidly as it had risen. The attempt to raise it in Paris had been tried; but Paris, beside its settled habit of pouting at everything which London has discovered, has an audience for its Italian opera different from ours. The latter has become shifting, variable,—in every respect liable to be abused by false reports. During the year of a certain mania, I saw the sum of fourteen guineas for a box,—no matter for what—no matter to hear whom,—to hold four people, paid away; and the box accepted as a favour by its fortunate holder. The maker-out of the voucher of the box aforesaid observed, drily, to his comrade at the desk, while he was blotting his ticket, "*Railway People!*"

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This sort of random speculation and extravagance of ours, this blind, or deaf, wish to be amused by the newest thing in fashion,—which has changed the character of our foreign opera audiences;—while it has in no respect checked the love for an understanding of the best music, which has also marvellously advanced in England,—has—*had* at least five years ago—touched far more remotely the frequenters of the Italian opera in Paris.—Though Fashion had abandoned it, some years earlier, (when I first knew Paris, no English *dilettante* would confess to entering any other musical theatre), there was still an audience, leavened to some degree, by a few *connoisseurs*, who had no scenic splendour to seduce them,—no orchestra such as ours, to entice ears enjoying orchestral effect,—to be made happy by compensation—for make-believe singing.—They found Mademoiselle Piccolomini a consummate example of this—a nonpareil among counterfeits.—They sent her away, accordingly, in high disdain; and with a little of the dear old comfortable contempt against English musical stupidity. That which is true, in a reproach, will stick to its victim. The "figure" of London folly began to decline, in regard to her fascinations—though in the country it was maintained for a while longer: but here, her shrugs, and nods and winks, and utter vocal inefficiency, were all

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too powerless (and it was well) to save a waning theatre.

As to the new Italian lady, Mademoiselle Spezzia,—the original "Traviata,"—a few words will suffice. She was a lady of good presence, with a voice of sufficient compass and power, and some passion in her acting. But her voice was an ungracious one: or else it had been ineradicably ruined by the mistaken modern habits and practices which have superseded those of the by-past school of training. Every note was disfigured by a sort of tough vibration, which entirely neutralized every other such good quality as its owner may have originally possessed. Her fate, though, was a hard one: because, after having been heralded with the inevitable flourish of trumpets, she was in an unusually short time treated with that unmistakeable neglect which amounts to positive discourtesy.—I best remember her, in connection with the one fragment of Mendelssohn's opera which has been performed on any stage: the *finale* to "Loreley," given at Her Majesty's Theatre only once, as part of a concert in costume. To this she was wholly unequal: without sufficient power of voice—without an idea of the required style.

That performance, however, made it obvious that Mendelssohn was sincere—when he spoke of "Loreley" as being a mere experiment. Admi-

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rable and impassioned as are portions of the long monologue with chorus rising into extreme grandeur at its close—elvish as are the opening choruses before the appearance of the betrayed Nymph,* the scene, for the stage, is impracticable—and, I venture to say, wearisome. The spirits of the Mist and the Stream, so fancifully dreamed of in the music, became gross, when grouped in a theatre: and the effect of their presence is confusing. The woe of the lorn maiden begins with a weight of style, almost befitting sacred music. It is too long drawn. Nor can I think that the phrase of the concluding frantic *allegro*, where she rends her veil, after the compact is made with the Spirits to avenge her, (the most unearthly passage in the whole movement, which Gluck might not have disdained to sign) is happily fancied. It is too abrupt, broken, short, spasmodic. I should not put this impression on record, had I not an impression equally strong, that had he lived to complete and to try his work, Mendelssohn would have shared it himself.

If Mademoiselle Spezzia may be commemorated

* In one of these,—the movement in A minor,—the two first verses are worth pointing out, to everyone studying manner—as obviously, containing an unconscious repetition of that fantastic but most effective accompaniment which gives so much of its peculiarity to the great "Walpurgis" chorus, in its writer's *Cantata*,

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as a fair specimen of the forcible *prima donna* of modern Italy—a degree lower in acquirement than such vehement ladies as Mdes. Sohoberlechner and Gazzaniga—whom it never was thought prudent to invite to England, great as had been their renown at degenerated Milan and Naples—Mademoiselle Ortolani was in some degree a comparative specimen of what now passes in the South for light or florid singing: since she attempted all the feats that the Persianis of better days had accomplished—and which were, in 1857, partly reproduced by the rapidly improving Madame Bosio. This was done not without a certain incomplete power over florid execution, which might have beguiled her audience for a while, had her natural powers been more genial: but her voice was shrill and wiry, qualities which are more easily pardoned (who can explain why?) in French than in Italian voices. She chose, too, for her appearance, "I Puritani," an ill-advised selection: since for her it was hopeless to think of doing that which a Persiani, a Lind, and a Bosio, had failed in doing. In this part, her variations were odd rather than effective.—The part of *Elvira* is one of sentiment as well as of vocal brilliancy. In the former the lady could hardly be called competent. As regards the latter, we are not yet so tolerant of counterfeit work, as are our neighbours over the Alps.—The filigree work must be of

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pure—not mosaic—gold.—The lace must be real: and of the finest flaxen thread—the patterns of both must be of good style; and if new, not therefore, fantastically disproportionate, or we will have none of them in first-class theatres.

There were several new gentlemen.—It had been said, before Signor Corsi arrived, that in him we were to have a tragic actor, whose *Nabucco* and *Rigoletto* were to efface those of Signor Ronconi. What effacement there was, was in the tones of his voice, which was utterly destroyed ere he sang here; more so, even, I think, than those of Signor Salvatori, in whom disappointment had kept such an ill pace with his foreign reputation.—I can hardly imagine Signor Corsi to have been even anything more than a meritorious singer. But under such circumstances as his, of crippled and decaying powers, the benefit of the doubt may fairly be given. The artist who appears, when past his prime, before a public of foreigners, with no old gratitude to endear him to them, does so at a perilous disadvantage. Signor Vialetti (a native of France, if I mistake not) proved himself, as he has been since found, a useful accessory member of a company.

Nor were these only strangers. There was Signor Beneventano the bold (warranted, also, as beautiful), who had been promised to us as the

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coming *Don Juan* of *Don Juans*, even as Signor Fornasari had been in former, more credulous, times:—but who came, and was seen, and did not conquer; and passed away, in spite of apparent triumphs, with a more deserved rapidity than Signor Fornasari had done.

The new *buffo*, Signor Rossi, was not, in the least, droll.

There were no less than four new tenors.—Two of these, Herr Reichardt (on the stage in no wise bearing his claims as a German concert singer)—and Signor Stecchi-Bottardi, were not fortunate. The latter, however, seemed a fair singer, when I heard him later in the year, at Genoa. So much for change of place.

Let me pass to something more genuine:—and name two artists of real merit, who also appeared, during this strange season—a pair of tenors, as widely dissimilar one from the other as two tenors can be—Signor Giuglini and M. Bèlart. I have no need to dwell on the gratification produced by the suavity of voice of the former gentleman, a welcome variety after the Stentorian exhibitions to which we have of late been unluckily habituated in the new singers from Italy; and by that certain elegance of style which some, nevertheless, have complained of as cold, languid, and over-elongated. I have no

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need to mention him, as the most satisfactory importation which has arrived since that of Signor Tamberlik: since these are things to be heard and tested by all who please at this moment of writing. It is permissable, however, to dwell on the charm,—apparently fast vanishing into empty air, which belongs to a real Italian singer. The "fatal gift of beauty," by nature belonging to Italy, made itself nowhere more felt than in the singer's art;—and even, till a recent period, might be found among voices untutored, and of no remarkable quality. The common street folk who used to sing "La sorte mia tiranna," or "Benedetta sia la madre," to guitar and *gironda*, before Donay's or Pedrocchi's Coffee-houses—or in such wondrous open-air theatres as St. Mark's Place, Venice;—or beneath the plane-tree walk at Cadenabbia, which leads up to the Villa Sommariva, on the lake of Como—used to be, somehow, more in the form, and belonging to the order, of singers,—than any other set of people among whom I have travelled. Latterly, the decline has been sadly perceptible. We are now rapidly approaching a period when the Italian opera-houses, on this side of the Alps, at least, must be maintained by French, German, English, and absolutely American singers; and it need not surprise anyone, should the chronicler who, thirty years hence, shall attempt a task such

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as mine now rapidly approaching its close, have to point to Signor Giuglini as the last of Italian tenors; in whom some of the graces of "the good old days" still lingered.

M. Bèlart—deceased while these pages were passing through the press—was a real singer—a Basque, or Spaniard, if I mistake not—endowed with no great power or fascination of voice—lifeless—not to say insignificant on the stage :—and this not merely in person, but also in dramatic conception. But he had vocal fire, nerve, brilliancy, in no common degree : and is a tenor not to be forgotten, as having been able to sing the *bravuras* of Signor Rossini, as they were written —further as a man having much of the earnest and modest self-respect which mark the true artist. In other days, when the singer was not required to act, according to our unhappy (or happy?) modern fashion—M. Bèlart would have been rated as an acquisition—compared with such helpless people as Curioni, who were "first lovers" when I began to know Italian opera in London.—He was a real artist, —as a man quiet, not vain—but a little tedious.

Neither the sentimental, nor the showy tenor, could restore the falling fortunes of *Her Majesty's Theatre*. Galvanized into the semblance of some life by false spells—opportunity helping the operation, in the catastrophe which had befallen the

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rival establishment—no unprejudiced looker-on could doubt what the result was to be at an early period: nor could feel amazed, when the virtually dead body sank back again into its tomb.

This year—I may say by way of Postscript—I had an opportunity abroad, as well as at home, of verifying the desolation which had swept over the world of Italian opera singing and composition. To be just, however, during this year, too, I heard the only good orchestral performance execution I have ever encountered in that country—I mean that in the *Carlo Felice* Theatre at Genoa—so ably presided over by *Il Cavaliere* Mariani.—The exquisite sentiment of this gentleman, as conductor of Southern music (I will venture to say unparalleled in Italy), left nothing to be desired. The band, a very fair one, though not equal to our London and Paris orchestras, then numbered some accomplished artists;—Signor Venzano, whose vocal waltz has given his name a certain vogue, being among the number. But I shall remember, as one of the highest musical treats of its kind which I have ever enjoyed—the *reading* of the pantomimic music which accompanies the final scene of "Linda di Chamouni." In itself, as a picture of the struggle betwixt insanity and reason, the music is thin, common, and conventional.—But as I have heard a great singer,

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by the force of feeling and conception, intensify some poor song, so as to give it the semblance of emotion (and who has not heard this, that is familiar with modern Italian opera?) so the admirable feeling of the conductor in question, for the situation, enabled him to carry the sympathies of his orchestra with him: and, it may be said without absurdity, to make it *sing*—with an impassioned and melancholy fitfulness—with a tear in every string, a sigh of yearning in every note breathed—so as to produce an effect inconceivable to those who have not heard it.—I recollect nothing so perfect by way of concerted instrumental expression—save one in the *antipodes* of the world of music—a certain performance of the Funeral March in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, under Herr Hiller's direction, heard a year or two later at the Whitsuntide Musical Festival at Cologne.

Such a conductor *could* almost carry off the inferiority of his singers: and the *prima donna*, Signora Pozzi, though utterly insignificant, was harmless—restrained by her excellent ruler from enacting any violences. The other members of the company were beneath mediocrity. An opera by Signor Pedrotti (who is considered one of the most promising masters of young Italy,) "Tutti in Maschera"—given in a new little theatre which just then had been opened in the thickly-peopled suburb

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of San Pier d'Arena, beyond the lighthouse had been prepared by the same careful and competent hand,* —and thus stood a better chance of success than it could have got anywhere else.—More, of course, nothing was to be expected from the singers:—the music struck me at the time as containing something more like honest composition than we have been used of late to find in Italy: especially a *finale* in which a couple of different subjects are ingeniously wrought together.

That same year I heard a posthumous opera by one Signor Ferrari, "L'Ultimo Giorno di Suli," a violent piece of rant, violently ranted through in the handsome *Canobbiana* Theatre at Milan, by singers, whom to avoid giving pain I will not name:—and "Crispinoé Comare," a feeble work by one of the Riccis, at a minor theatre in the Lombard capital. It was given a few weeks later in

* I cannot resist reminding the reader of what, though not utterly unknown in London, is still, as yet, too little known here—the choice and expressive beauty of Signor Mariani's songs.—Though something of the bright and artless fancy of the elder Italian melodists be wanting to them—though in the more ambitious among them, there may be too obvious a strain after the vocal effects of Signor Verdi, and the instrumental accompaniments in which M. Meyerbeer delights, the best of them have a beauty and a charm, which place them by the side of, and in point of solidity and science above, the Tuscan songs of Gordigiani,—that Schubert of Italy.

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London, by a fourth-rate company, brought hither with the mistaken notion of establishing the novelties and the singers of modern Italian *opera buffa*. The insipidity of the music was only equalled by the badness of the performers: one alone of whom stood out, as not merely endurable, but showing a certain promise in the guise of ready humorous exaggeration, which he has since, in some measure, followed out.—This was Signor Ciampi, who has still, happily, time in abundance before him to ripen into a clever and original *buffo* singer: and who, happily for his good chances, has exchanged Italy for England.

My last Italian experience of 1857 was gathered in the splendid *Carignano* Theatre at Turin, then gorgeous, and looking as if lined from vaulted roof to pit with cloth of gold. There I heard Signor Verdi's "Aroldo," an altered, and, it was said, an improved, version of his "Stifellio;" on a story not clear to understand, save that it was truculent and mysterious in no common degree: that there are in it tyrants, assassins, I think—I am sure a raving *prima donna*—and abundance of church music behind the scenes.—I find in my notes, too, mention of an agreeably consistent overture to this violent story, in the form of a *Galoppe*, and of the utterly disproportionate predominance of the brazen instruments.—"Aroldo," then, I think

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must take its place among its writer's weaker works (ridiculous though the epithet seems, after the foregoing description.) The fury of the heroine—Madame Gariboldi-Bassi—and of the lover, Signor Negrini—was not less whimsically at variance with the indifference of the Piedmontese public.—The work, however, for aught I know, may since have righted itself: for I have never heard an opera more furiously hissed than was "Viscardello" (the Papal version of "Rigoletto") at Rome, in the year 1851: although that unequal work is now everywhere. So, also, "La Traviata" failed on the night of its birth.

In truth, the impression which must be more and more forced on everyone the deeper that examination goes, amounts to this—that Italian connoisseurship is defunct; that the necessity for excitement, which in Music has been growing up for the past thirty years with the rapidity of the faëry bean stalk, has brought the public into that state in which good and bad have no longer a meaning or a distinction. But enough of a long, and not a very cheerful, postscript.

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THE YEAR 1858.

HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"La Zingara."*—*Balfe.* "Don Pasquale."—*Donizetti.* "Les Huguenots."—*Meyerbeer.* "Le Nozze," "Don Giovanni." —*Mozart.* "La Serva Padrona." —*Paisiello.* "Il Trovatore," "Nabucco," "Luisa Miller,"*—*Verdi.*

Principal Dancers.

Mdes. Alboni. Piccolomini. Sannier.* Tietjens.* Ortolani.—MM. Giuglini. Belletti. Vialetti. Rossi. Belart. Aldighieri. Beneventano. Castelli.*

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"Fra Diavolo."—*Auber.* "Norma."—*Bellini.* "Lucrezia." —*Donizetti.* "Martha,"*—*Flotow.* "Zampa."—*Herold.* "Les Huguenots,"—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni,"—*Mozart.* "La Traviata," "Il Trovatore."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Grisi. Bosio. Parepa. Nantier-Didiée. Marai.—MM. Mario. Tamberlik. Gardoni. Neri-Baraldi. Graziani. Ronconi. Tagliafico. Polonini. Zelger.

DRURY LANE.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"La Sonnambula."—*Bellini.* "Lucrezia."—*Donizetti.* "Don Juan."—*Mozart.* "Il Barbiére,"—*Rossini.* "Il Trovatore," "Rigoletto."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Fumagalli.* Gassier. Salvini-Donatelli.* Viardot. Laura Baxter.* Vaneri.* Persiani. Rudersdorff.—MM. C. Braham. Naudin.* Badiali.*

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THE YEAR 1858.

In proportion as our own times are neared, any record of recollections becomes more and more difficult. It is obviously impossible freely to characterize new-comers, whose talents may not yet have matured themselves—whose short-comings may still be open to correction: almost as impossible (if ever the rights of privacy are to be solicitously respected) as it would be to put into print the merits and defects of the man, or woman, who had been our neighbour at table yesterday.—Of the artists, who have taken an assured position in England, for better for worse, I have had no hesitation in speaking; but to offer impressions of those whose better or worse days may be still to come, would be an ungracious proceeding, to which (were it found ever so piquant by friend or by foe) no considerate person could resign him-

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self. It is best, therefore, to deal with the performances of this year, and the following one, in some points, less minutely than formerly.

They were varied and miscellaneous, and sufficiently distracting—seeing that during the season 1857-8, *four* Italian opera houses were open in London: and this at a period when the supply of Italian singers had notoriously slackened—when the art of Italian singing had obviously deteriorated, and when the repertory of opera in Italian had manifestly to be fed from foreign sources.

To the *opera buffa* at the St. James Theatre I have already adverted. There appeared, among other Southern strangers, a real Neapolitan *Pulcinello*, who, with a mask on his face, and a *costume* not unlike that of a cook, leaped and gesticulated: and conceived himself unaccountably funny.—Well-a-day for such home favourites as can content the easy-going people of Naples, when they have to exhibit behind London gas-light! But this particular *Pulcinello* (in whose case, I am sure, that no pain can be given by the plainest-speaking of one's mind in English) was,—supposing him viewed from any Neapolitan point of view, whether from "Santa Lucia" or the Chiatamone, or from a stall in the Theatre San Carlino, or a corner shop in the Strada del Toledo,

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where water-barrels go round like the wheels of a mystical water-mill—a remarkably dreary companion—a mime who could have enlivened nobody in the capital of the Two Sicilies.—It is a pity when such as he are fooled over to this country of ours with brave expectations. But, what has been will be again.

"Those tuneful bells will still ring on."

The foolish judgment of those whose business it is to judge, and who reject appeal to any standard, will, till the end of theatrical time, too often mystify every relation of Artist to Public—and spoil every proportion which distinguishes Truth from Untruth.

The wavering policy pursued by the management of Her Majesty's Theatre made itself felt this year. The season commenced in February—ended, and re-commenced later. It was first to be cheap, and afterwards dear. Lastly came a *codicil* sort of season to a last dying-speech and testament—cheap again. The only new artist who appeared worthy consideration was Mademoiselle Tietjens.

Of the new operas produced it is easier to speak, than to characterise the German lady's superb *soprano* voice. The first opera was Mr. Balfe's "Bohemian Girl," which, in Italian, was given with sung, for spoken, *recitative*, and was

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received in its new dress with applause from the many, loud enough to "rend the heavens." But an English grand opera, in which, for the sake of *encores*, ballads must be poked in, no matter how, no matter where,—when presented with a Southern text, simply becomes a "Deformed Transformed." During the lovely ballad there can be no movement on the scene, and there is no passion in the rhymed platitudes, though these may have drawn tears from the Gallery, and may have suggested tunes to the barrel-organ. In a work of this quality there is no opera, as the word is understood, among the other countries of Europe. Further, a musical drama made from the book of a *ballet* (and who, that ever saw it, can forget Mademoiselle Fanny Elssler, in "Le Gipsy"?) always labours under the disadvantage of requiring pantomimic motion in place of suggested music. "La Sonnambula" is the great exception; because the story of that opera is nearly as simple as the "Simple Story" of Mrs. Inchbald. There is a fury of rapture, however, with which even a column of decimals would be received if a Rachel or a Ristori were to recite it on the stage—Though this is not precisely the case in the present instance, the poor "La Zingara" was received, in the year 1858, with a triumph which had never been exceeded, even in the days of

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the Catalani. As regards Italian repertory—where is it already?

It was pleasant to hear the elegant, if somewhat feeble, operetta by Paisiello, "La Serva Padrona," which had been long before set—by the more charming, more solid, more intense, Pergolesi. How pretty, how graceful, the music was!—if somewhat weak—music fairly to be measured against that of Mozart's "Schauspiel-Direktor," which turned up nearly at the same time: and which proved how intimately Mozart had felt the spell of Italy, as Italy was in his youth.—That the German had more solidity than the Italian composer, might have been divined from the first note of either man's music; but that the German would have never been what he was, without having seen Italy, is no less evident.

Also, there was presented a third work, new to our Italian stage—Signor Verdi's "Luisa Miller," in which Schiller's torturing German burgher drama, "Kabal und Liebe," was to be pressed into Southern opera service.

It has seemed to me that, as one among Signor Verdi's operas, "Luisa Miller," taken on its own terms, of fire, faggot, and rack, is the weakest of the weak. There are *staccato* screams in it enough to content any lover of shocking excitement; but the entire texture of the music implies

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(I can but fancy) either a feeble mistake, or else a want of power on the part of an artificer; who, obviously (as Signor Verdi does), demanding situation, and passion, and agony, to kindle the fire under his cauldron—has, also, only one alphabet, one grammar, one dictionary, whatsoever the scene, whatsoever the country — one *cantabile*, one spasmodic *bravura*—one feverish *crascendo*, as the average tools, by pressure of which the stress on the public is to be strained out. I cannot conceive any English audience returning to "Luisa Miller," and fancy that already the opera may be dead in Italy.

The year 1858 gave to London a new theatre for Italian opera—so far as the stage, and the portion of the house allotted to the audience, are concerned, more ample and pompous than any theatre hitherto existing here. It would seem, however, as if, of later days, nothing complete, in all its parts, can be arranged for British uses; that if the public room be grand and spacious, the means of ingress and outlet must needs be pinched;—as if, in fact, we were living in a period of architectural compromise and extravagant economy.

The really commodious theatres of Europe, as distinguished from the magnificent ones, are, I

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suspect, few in number. The new opera house in Moscow, built by M. Cavos, is generally considered to be the most thoroughly magnificent theatre existing. I confess to a great heresy regarding the glory of the *Teatro San Carlo*, at Naples; as, also, that of the *Teatro la Scala*, at Milan:—the latter, however, being the grander of the two, in right of its proportions; both having a certain vast and naked look which no costly decorations can altogether mystify or conceal. The *Teatro Carlo Fenice*, at Genoa, is, for a theatre of the first class, better proportioned than either of the former, without appearing to be uninhabitable.—Throughout the Continent (especially in Italy) there are theatres of a second class, the like of which have no existence in this inconsistent and costly London of ours: where it would seem as if no modern architectural purpose can be thoroughly or efficiently wrought out—unless it be in a world far more important than the world dramatic—engineering architecture.

Perhaps the theatre which is the most complete in its form and proportions is Professor Semper's new one at Dresden: a building which has, further, the rare merit of distinctly announcing its purpose, in its outward construction.—The Comic Opera, at Paris, is terrible for any one to sing in it, however pleasant to the eye and comfortable to

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the spectator. The *Thèatre Lyrique*, of Paris about to be destroyed—a flat oval, in which everyone was brought near to the stage:—and that stage a large one, capable of any amount of scenic effect—seems to have presented one of the best forms of theatres. In regard to acoustic effect, the same is so capricious that I can fancy no lecture, no theory, no experience, of such effects able to account for certain successes to be found in theatres constructed by accident.

A thousand things more could be noted in regard to theatres and their peculiarities. One could write a page on Palladio's antique theatre at Vicenza,—another on the marble theatre at Pavia; One could call up the thousand recollections which cling to that dingy barn, the *Kärnther Thor* Theatre in Vienna, which still has been the scene of so many brilliant musical exploits.—Then a chapter could be written on open-air theatres, not forgetting that one at Herrenhausen: whence our reigning family came over, and in which the Kilmansegges and Schulembergs, and other fat Hanoverian Sultanas, may have sat and shivered;—sustained through the damp and the chill of the climate, and under the gloom of the umbrage, by the delicious and heroic idea that their entertainment was something charming and French—quite as good as anything at Versailles.

Again, it might not be wholly unprofitable to

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discuss how far, for the uses of dramatic representation, the Italians are right or wrong in darkening the portion of the theatre allotted to the audience—so as wholly to concentrate the entire interest of the evening on the play and its actors;—even though strange to say, this is accompanied by those habits of love-making, coffee-drinking, ice-eating, card-playing in ante-rooms, which make of the Italian opera-houses virtually so many social music-halls; in which nobody pretends to listen to an entire performance, but merely to one song or to one singer.—Another matter worth propounding and pondering would be, the superiority of the arrangements of scenery in France over those of England; where we, nevertheless, have such surpassing scene-painters. It might be reasonably inquired, why in London the eye should be hurt by scraps and snips, and those utterly impossible expositions called "sky-borders;" and wherefore, in Paris, a street should seem a street—and a wood a wood; and the spectator not there be vexed by any make-believe discrepancy, save that which belongs to the false reds, or crude greens—otherwise to the badness of colouring, from which our neighbours are only now beginning to emancipate themselves.—But the romance and reality of theatrical architecture must be left to other hands than mine for the present.

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The performers and performances in the new theatre are to be spoken of, and the novelties which they included.—The improvement of Madame Bosio, from season to season, was never more evident than in 1858;—an improvement which carried off the trashy music of "La Traviata"—and carried away the part from Mdlle. Piccolomini.

This, too, was the year of a strange experiment: the one made by Signor Mario to do what Garcia and Donizelli had done before him—to lay hands on the character of *Don Juan*. Of all these usurpations, howsoever they be justified by success, there can be only one opinion. All such experiments are false in point of taste; false in point of art; false in point of ambition. The part naturally attracted Signor Mario—because he is the best operatic tenor actor who has been seen in our time; because he could present the man to be presented, better in face and costume than any one who has till now played it; and because there was "gentle breeding" in his presentment of the libertine. Yet a more complete mistake I do not recollect. The music became weak and strange and singular in his hands, without the presentation of the drama serving the cause of the usurper.

Of the chances of "Zampa" on the Italian stage in London, I have already spoken.—The third unfamiliar opera, produced during this first year

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of the new theatre, was M. von Flotow's "Martha." Here we have another *ballet* set as an opera—another tribute to the animated invention of our allies, and one in which the story, being less gymnastic than other *ballet* stories put into music, might rationally excite the fancy of a composer.—M. von Flotow's "Martha," without question, enjoys a universal currency—which no subsequent opera by him has, till now, acquired.

Yet it may be fairly asked,—supposing the "Last Rose of Summer" taken away (Moore's amateur refinement on "The Groves of Blarney,")—what would remain to "Martha?"—The spinning quartett—the "Good Night"—*not* the "*Porter*" song (*Porter* here meaning Barclay and Perkins, by way of giving to the part an ancient English colour) a song vapid as is the residue out of a stale vat—and the romance, which, with its Italian words, "*M'appari*," was made captivating by Signor Mario's voice and passion.—The tale, no doubt, is amusing—though as extravagant as any dream that ever disturbed the sleep of an opium eater; but the music is poor, small, hybrid; and except for Thomas Moore, and his amateur liberties, which converted an old rollicking Irish song into a sweet sentimental melody, "Martha" could hardly have lived a week.

In the year 1858 there was a fourth Italian opera house—at Drury Lane. In this, the

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noticeable performers were Madame Viardot, Madame Persiani, M. Naudin (a tenor who may have a future to come), and Signor Badiali: a veteran singer, whose "Indian Summer," as Americans have it, was better than the spring of most successors to his occupation. Had this great artist arrived some years earlier, he would have made good that lasting place which real artists always keep in England, no matter how counterfeit ones can take it for awhile.

POSTCRIPT.—The year 1858 gave me yet one more opportunity of realizing the ruin of Italian music in its own country—and this at one of its most splendid palaces, the *Teatro San Carlo* of Naples. There I heard Signor Verdi's "Lionello,"—at Rome, "Viscardello," originally "Rigoletto,"—which may have borne as many other names in as many other towns as Italian censorship pleased. That opera, was given at Naples less well than I have heard it given anywhere else.—There Signora Fioretti sang in it steadily, without the slightest charm; and there Signor Fraschini seemed less boisterous than he had shown himself in London. But the orchestra was shabby, and the chorus was paltry—and the opera, under its castigated form, produced no effect whatsoever.—Yet English tourists, with enthusiasm to let, will speak in raptures of any Italian operatic performance; no

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matter how bad it may be: because the price of entrance is, compared with ours, cheap; and because of the novelty in the audience and in the surroundings, which naturally has so much charm for a people at once so reserved or so imaginative as the English—and who too often appear, when as tourists on the Continent, to know small medium between the extremes of love and hate—of blind rapture, or sullen contempt.

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THE YEAR 1859.

ROYAL ITALIAN OPERA.

PRINCIPAL OPERAS.

"Dinorah,"* "Les Huguenots."—*Meyerbeer.* "Don Giovanni."—*Mozart.* "La Gazza," "Otello."—*Rossini.* "Il Trovatore," "Rigoletto," "La Traviata."—*Verdi.*

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Lotti della Santa.* Calderon.* Grisi. Nantier-Didiée. Penco.* Miolan-Carvalho.* Marai.—MM. Mario. Gardoni. Tamberlik. Neri-Baraldi. Ronconi. De'Bassini. Zelger. Tagliafico.

DRURY LANE.

Principal Singers.

Mdes. Balfe. Piccolomini. Guarducci.* Tietjens. Sarolta.* Weisser.*—MM. Giuglini. Badiali. Graziani* (a tenor). Bèlart. Fagotti.* Vialetti.

The new operas promised were none of them performed.

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THE YEAR 1859.

THE first event of 1859 was sad enough.—The death of Madame Bosio, made a vacancy in the opera-world, which will not be very soon filled. An artist, whose progress was so steady, and so complete as hers, is so rare (of late times) among the choir of singing-birds, that, when such a one as she may disappear, the trouble becomes doubly painful.—She perished from the Russian climate, and owing to her too incessant labour.

The other event of this year, was the production of M. Meyerbeer's latest opera; the opera meant by him to be simple, pleasant—and peasant. It is worth a study.

I have elsewhere pointed out the extent to which M. Meyerbeer has wronged himself, owing to his superfluous anxiety. Here is a pathetic, characteristic, and simple village anecdote, dragged out of shape and lengthened, without its being made, in any

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respect, a great work; an opera rendered difficult to produce and tiresome to hear merely because the charm, which lived in the original thought, has been exhausted and elongated.

The notion of a divining-rod which should bring out the precious metal from the entrails of the earth is, possibly, in any event, too far-fetched a fancy to be clad in Music. But in this case, there was contrived an earlier story:—(I conceive, invented as a supplement), in which occurs the fire at a farm house, on a Breton Saint's Day, as a consequence of which fire the girl of the farm grows mad.—So that, during the First, the Second, and part of the Third act of this opera, we have a mad heroine.

It is needless to point out how tremendously such a condition loads the actress—especially when after having been requested to be solidly mad, for two acts and three-quarters, at the last she must needs waken up in her wet clothing, recover her sanity and go straightway to be married. It seems too much forgotten by the makers of opera-books, that Insanity moves within as narrow limits as faëry work—that the half-visionary remembrances of old thoughts in old tunes, has become an engine to excite curiosity and suspense, as hackneyed as the old duett of "He" and "She;" in which, first, the man sang his admiration—and, secondly, the woman responded to the

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same.—It may be noted as a fact, that the employment of this element in music is a comparatively modern one.—The masters of Drama resorted to it sparingly. Setting aside such a tragedy of horror as the "Duchess of Malfi,"—Shakspeare may be said to have exhausted it, in his straw-crowned *Lear* and his tender *Ophelia*; and in the one of these pitiful stories, there is a majesty—in the other, an exquisite and maidenly beauty—which give to both of the diseased ones as much individuality as belongs to any healthful being of the mind. But of late, there has been a serviceable use of brain-distemperature resorted to by playwrights—especially in Opera; the end of which is, that no one is frightened, no one hurt—because the audience is perfectly aware that the miracle of cure and redemption will arrive, during the symphony to the *cabaletta* of the last song of the *prima donna*.

Besides the "Nina Pazza," thrice set—the one mad opera, which holds some place in the library of musical drama, is Paërs, "Agnese";—an opera which has vanished, perhaps not to return;—though containing some of the best music written by Signor Rossini's predecessor, to whom Signor Rossini is so much beholden, for many of its forms and effects. Opera-goers, of a time before mine, are still living who go back with fond admiration to Ambrogetti's personification of the shame-crazed father. Such

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character, however, as laid in this, must have been brought to it by the artist: since the music is even and regular, to respectability, without freak or distemperature indicated.

We English, long ere this, had already produced something of the class infinitely more characteristic. In our store of national music, nothing could be named to exceed the mad-songs of Purcell: in particular his "Delirious Lady"—though this (to make the matter more remarkable) is a song of counterfeit insanity, assumed by *Altisidora* to fool *Don Quixote* to the top of his bent. It would be hard to name any recitative in any language more instinct with the wild wayward frenzy of despair, than the one which opens this noble *scena*:—as a specimen of powerful expression, unparagoned, its date considered.—Later compositions could be counted by hundreds—the mad scene in Signor Rossini's "Semiramide," for the most part generously omitted, in mercy to the powers of the average *Assur*, especially to be remembered—but none to exceed glorious John Dryden's "From rosy bowers."

But for better for worse, such productions will always be painful on the stage; almost as painful as the exhibition of physical suffering, or the slow agonies of disease. In "Le Pardon" the sting is drawn by the comfortable assurance which the least

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experienced opera-goer must feel from the very first that a cure will be wrought, ere the curtain falls. So that while allowing the employment in music of what is wild and stern,—of the fierce, and the terrible, as shades not to be avoided—supposing the picture to be severe and historical,—the long, weary madness of the Breton girl, *Dinorah*, who, as was to be foreseen, is re-animated into sense and marriage at thePloermel Saint's day, offered a difficulty rather than a temptation to any composer, who desired to mate the madness with musical method.

Our neighbours, as dramatic authors, think otherwise;—and thus M. Meyerbeer has been seduced by the local tone of his work, into conniving at an extension of a painful, foolish incident. And what is more, thus there can be small question as to the fact, that, owing to the nature of its subject, "Le Pardon," simple as it may seem in point of incident and number of characters, has been made curiously difficult to represent.

The music of it, however, is well worth a study: if only because the opera in its form is virtually identical with the form of predilection in England as regards operas, where there must be ballads in any quantity, and of every quality;—where the lady is to die, and the lover is to go mad,—and the villain is to rejoice—not to "Love, still Love," (as Moore sang it) but to "Ballad, still Ballad."—

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Viewed in this respect, "Dinorah," or "Le Pardon," is a model—in right of the tunes showered over it from the first to the last bar. The overture, which tells the story of the poor crazed girl, is a puzzle—since it is hard from it to unthread the idea of the Breton farm-house,—burnt down on the day of a church festival;—the hymn "Sancta Maria" behind the curtain,—sung by voices—be it ever so lovely—when thus looked on, wants explanation even for such hearers as prefer vagueness in a prelude. From the first to the last of the two first acts, there is an affluence of fresh, wild, quaint melody (the second part always weaker than the first:—but this is M. Meyerbeer's weakness)—remarkable, as occurring in the last work of so mature and elaborate a composer.—Better snatches of song could be found nowhere in the first act than the cradle-song of the poor mad heroine,—than the fancy in the duett, where she imagines herself reaping—with its delirious *coda*. Then, again—there are few, if any things, better in Music—than what may be called the formula of the gold-diggers,—so rough, so sharply cut, yet so clear.—The terzett closing the first act, is to be specified as having a freshness, subtlety and beauty, beyond the reach of any other living—or of many a dead writer. The delicious elegance and luxury of instrumentation, employed when the subject is returned to;—the skill with which interest is

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heightened and suspended to the very close;—the clearness of the ideas;—and (what is not habitual with the master) their amplitude, make this terzett something unparagoned; at least in the library of modern music.

In the second act, the most popular feature, save for those who care about stage carpentry,—("sensation" they call it now),—is the shadow-dance. But infinitely better, to those who study "Le Pardon" as a wild opera, will be found the snatch of melody which precedes it—a tune, which might have been put into the mouth of *Ophelia*;—and infinitely better is the sinister legend of menace, with which the crazed creature denounces the gold-seeker as one marked for death.—In these, the freshness of the original thought is not marred by any deficiency in working out the same.—As "snatches of song," there is nothing better in the whole domain of Music.—The catastrophe, when the sluices burst; and the bridge breaks—a combination to be avoided, not courted, by any great musician—is virtually weakly treated by M. Meyerbeer.—He has relied on the rotten tree, and the bursting-out water;—and on a considerable noise in the orchestra.—But these things do not make an opera.

The third act of "Le Pardon" is an afterthought—a platitude. The sportsman, the reaper,

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the goatherds, who successively sing—and, afterwards, simultaneously chaunt a morning prayer:—are one and all superfluous.—The conclusion of the story, depending on the restoration to sanity and matrimony by daylight, of the wet woman fished out of the broken sluices at midnight,—can hardly be exceeded in absurdity.

And yet throughout this unnatural opera, the peculiar genius of the master will be everywhere traced—by those who look beneath the surface:—not merely his shortness of breath as regards melodic inspiration—but, also, his daintiness in instrumental combination.—Elaborate, overwrought as the latter may be found, it is still so full of rich beauty, masked by so many touches of quaint, characteristic delicacy, as with all who think largely to redeem it from the charge of being merely a piece of head-work. Most observable, as marking character and predilection, is the excess to which the Overture is elaborated; not less observable, than the real want of resource with which so long-drawn a composition, containing so many lovely half-melodies and choice episodes is conducted.

It is almost idle, at so recent a period, to descant on the admirable performance of this work at the Royal Italian Opera,—on the grace and finish of Madame Miolan-Carvalho,—on the peasant poltroonery of Signor Gardoni, and, last year, (1861)

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the morose rudeness of that accomplished French artist, M. Faure.—Nothing of the kind is now attainable in any other European theatre.

I shall be absolved from dwelling on the strangers who appeared for the first time in 1859; some of whom were only birds of passage, who came for once and no more.— One fact, however, must be repeated: the cessation of supplies to our Italian Opera Houses from Italy.—So far as concerns singers, the schools of Paris have replaced those of Milan, Naples, and Venice.

Of the Italian Opera at Drury Lane, there is small need to speak at length.—There was rarely ever put forth a more appetizing list of promises: not even in the days when Mendelssohn's "Tempest" was cast and illustrated, before a note of its music had been written.—Signor Verdi's "Macbeth" (in which opera the part of the *Lady* had been played with prodigious fire by Madame Viardot, in the provinces) — Gluck's "Armida" — (Gluck's operas being regularly promised by every theatrical manager, who would, like *Mrs. Jarley*, be "calm and classical," but, somehow, coming scantily to English performance—except as concert-music in Manchester)—Signor Petrella's "Ione," or the blind girl of Pompeii—a working out of the graceful and fascinating creation of Sir E. Lytton's Neapolitan Romance—were all promised.—Not one of these promises was fulfilled.

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THE LAST CHAPTER.

THIS is always a weary one to write—having in its very nature something of parting—something testamentary—something, whatever the task may have been, that includes pain, beyond such relief as belongs to a labour completed.

I close this book of sketches with mingled feelings.—If it have been welcome to recall various emotions due to a favourite art and pursuit during the course of many years,—to pay tribute to what has seemed to me universally beautiful, and thoughtful, and true,—it has been impossible the while not to be saddened while noting my recollections. —How few are left of the great composers and their interpreters who carried away lovers of Music into the faëry-land for which they sought!—How many are gone of the playmates whose pleasure in their enchantments added the encouragement of sympathy to my own pleasures!

I cannot conceal from myself, that whatsoever may

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have been the gain, in technical performance, won by England, during the last thirty years, the losses to the great world of art (which is of no country), have been greater.—There are no signs on the horizon of great singers—very few of real composers, in the domain to which I have restricted the remembrances here thrown together.

But, in truth, whether the field be Oratorio, Symphony, or chamber-music, the same tale has to be told.—There appears to be little youth of heart, and as little truth of fancy among those who aspire for first honours. There is skill, no doubt—and I as little doubt, honesty—since the advance in conscientious training among average musicians is, indeed, remarkable and comforting—but the divine spirit—the soul, the life-breath—that which gives to one man's genius the voice of a clarion—and to another's the persuasion of a breeze, that sweeps over the grass, which it scarcely touches—where are they?—Is Invention dead?—or is it buried, like Ogier, the Dane, to break its tomb, when the spell is taken off, and some true champion penetrates into the heart of the sepulchre?

There is little, at all events, for the moment, to afford anything like an oracular answer.—Let us see how far Speculation can push its torch; so as to pierce the fog, impending over an art so lovely, which has so largely entered into our daily life, as

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ours. It may be urged, that, in the story of Time and Change, which I have tried to tell, Music has only followed the condition of every imaginative art—that, inasmuch as there has been a cycle of architects, first Greek, then Gothic—a cycle of painters, northern and southern—a cycle of dramatists—and that since our age, with all its fertility, all its convenience, all its brilliancy, all its honest appreciation of the lovely things of the past—cannot even reproduce—still less originate—in any of the worlds conquered, enjoyed, and exhausted—it may be now the fate of Music, as of her Divine Sisters in art, to fall away into a sleep: not therefore to be forgotten—not ceasing to influence, yet, perhaps, never either to waken to her old simple youth, or to resume her mature adornment.—But there is an answer to this doleful suggestion.—Music has always been a capricious art: in no respect bound in its life by analogy to the other arts of imagination, with which it is still closely, inextricably united.—The Poet can write tranquilly, and lay his verses aside against a better day than the one which neglects him—(and in this respect the poet includes the great dramatist, whether he be tragic or comic). The Painter can paint his pictures, sell them at indifferent prices, see the door of some private gallery shut over them, and take his leave, during his life-time, of some dream,

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on which he has exercised his finest fancies, his powers most dearly bought by experience.—But the musician's work, until it is exhibited, before a public—can be only a work incomplete, inasmuch as Music has only a theoretical existence, till it has been tried by the composer's own conscience,—and approved or forgotten, by those to whom it is submitted.—Nor is there any manner of dragging a public, to hear a second time, that which, on the first introduction, has left the public indisposed to return.—And besides all this, Music must, somehow or other, reflect the manners and fancies of its birth-time and birth-place,—and also the conditions of executive art.

In every respect Europe has seen a wondrous amount of change, during the last century and a half.—Whereas the national schools of composition have entirely formed themselves, and split asunder during that period, amateurship has become less exclusive—more cosmopolite.—Yet Fancy has had its curious ebbs and flows, totally irrespective of Fashion.—In reply to all the jargon about "points of departure"—as to the manner in which one reputation is built on and supersedes another,—in which old laws are abrogated, old truths voted obsolete, in favour of more enlightened ideas,—it may be emphatically pointed out, that during the very time at which the crudities and chaotic

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beauties of Beethoven's posthumous works, began to be seized on as pretexts and models by a school of irrational enthusiasts weary of conformity—the admirable science and fertility of Sebastian Bach, the ancient, began first to be appreciated;—while Mendelssohn, the modern, with far more restricted poetical endowments, and a certain formality, at times approaching to aridity, (if judged by romantic standards), built up as his own individuality, —the only universal German reputation which has been established since that of Beethoven!—The period which has seen the return (after a season of eclipse), to the noble but grave Sonatas of Clementi and Dussek—has also seen the establishment of the wayward, incomplete, fantastic, yet most fascinating Chopin,—on a pedestal of his own. —The years, during which singers'-music has been stamped into bits as so much trash, by the Wagners of New Germany—and bawled into a premature destruction of its voice, by the Verdis of infuriate Italy—have been also, those in which the magnificent vocal music of Handel has been more largely circulated and studied, in all its range —than during the time when it was thrown off.

What is to be got from all these contradictions —all these confusions?—A conclusion that Music is about to perish—an admission that Music is to be emancipated by the annihilation of some

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among its elements? For me, neither the one nor the other:—no lamentation that our "virtue" has eaten up "the cakes and ale" of the future—no credulity in the despotic miracle of "bricks made without straw."—I believe that original genius may, always, re-appear, and will make for itself some fresh channel.—I believe that thoughtful science, not shrinking from retrospect, not averse to discovery, will increasingly refer to Record, not to Tradition,—will increasingly separate that which is of the hour, from that which does not pass away. The "players" have had their riot:—the orchestra and its combinations have been driven into that prominence and perfection to which extravagance and corruption may be the inevitable sequel. The turn of the singers may be again to come.—I believe that a composer of Opera, no matter of what country, may yet arise, who may conciliate charm, science, effect, discovery, and expression—so as to produce a more perfect and enduring whole, than the world has hitherto possessed—though we, of the generation rapidly passing away, who remember the music of the last thirty years, may not be "there to see."

Fortunately, however—though betwixt Italian indolence, and German transcendentalism—there is no ordinary confusion and loss in the singers' world—there is increasingly good training in

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France; and, in this country, a desire among our singers for a vocal superiority, which is stronger than when I began to listen to music—because it is more deeply based than formerly on that musical science and general usefulness, which the spread of intercourse and the wide field of foreign art, to be commanded (till our own shall renew its nationality), have rendered indispensable.—English singing has suffered largely from our national love of the ballad; in which a melancholy execution, *ad libitum*, has been accepted expressive: and in which "The Banks of Allan Water," the "Last Rose of Summer," and "Auld Robin Gray"—never came to an end.—We are still, as a nation, deficient in that accent, which the French possess, in almost a superfluous degree—we are still too much enamoured of long and lovely notes:—though the old style of English tunes, which was so largely abused by our second-rate composers, at the beginning of the century, has been exchanged for one more modish and quasi-foreign.—Our artists, as a body, have something to gain, in point of that precision, without formality, which has to do so much with the meaning of music and the charm of melody. Yet, that they have derived benefit from that which has harmed the Germans, in their singing,—the increased appreciation of instrumental music—it would not be hard to prove. They have improved,

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too, as linguists, while the singers of other nations have stood still. In short, there is rally and progress in our world of music, strangely capricious as are its motions. A higher standard of execution is desired and tried for than formerly—a more intelligent rivalry with the artists of other countries. —In these polyglott days, the English singers stand better before the world than they did thirty years ago.

But these speculations bring me from the domain of recollection, so far forward into the world of contemporary criticism—as to warn me of a limit to my task.—It would be immodest and vexatious to attempt to appraise reputations, which can be hardly said, as yet, to have settled themselves: to discuss the merits or demerits of singers of the present time, whose ways and means may be modified long after the chronicler from before the curtain has passed away. Let some one else, if not more sincerely desirous of distinguishing diamond from paste — true from false — not less willing to add to the enjoyments of the past those of the present,—more capable than myself on some future day—go on with the history of Foreign Opera in England.

I have done my best to tell a plain tale, sincerely.

THE END.

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